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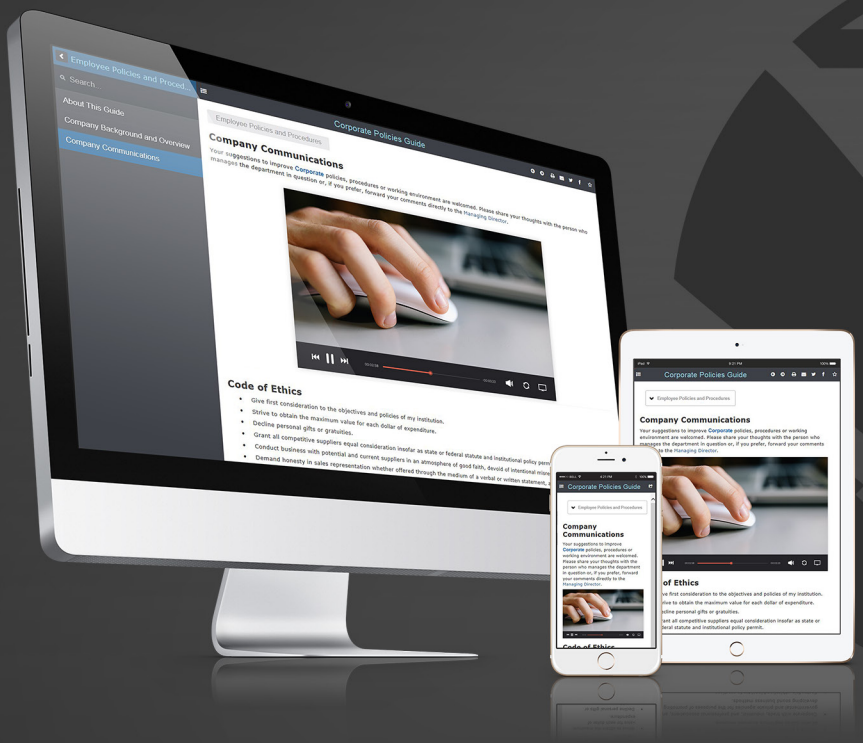

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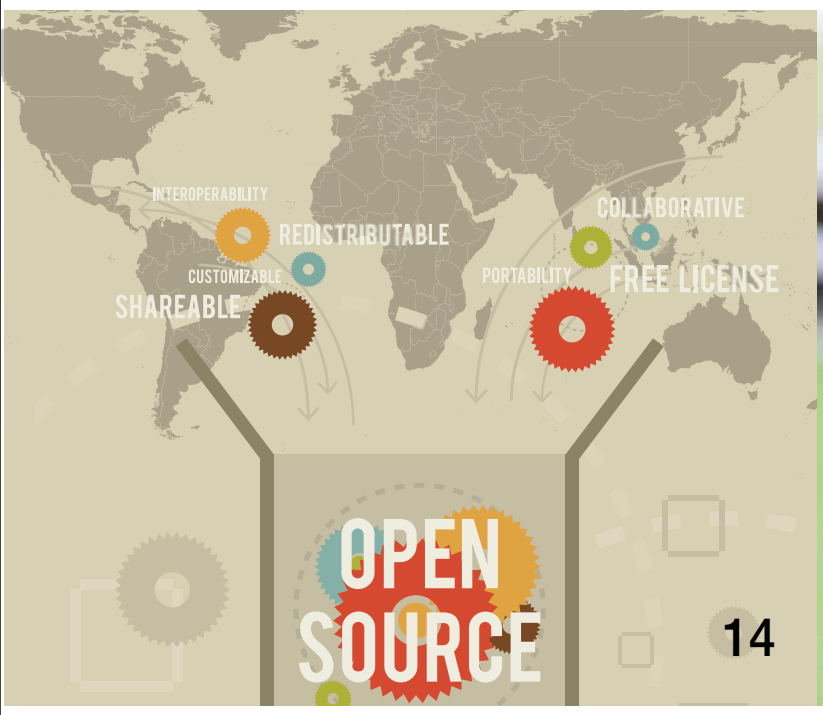

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A Note from the Editor

KIRK ST.AMANT AND ANN WILEY have put together a fantastic issue on international technical communication. As they detail in their editorial, the six articles they solicited focus on a six-context framework—informational, technological, positional, experiential, professional, and educational—with each article representing one perspective on each context for approaching culture and communication.

Kirk St.Amant is the incoming Eunice C. Williamson Endowed Chair of Technical Communication at Louisiana Tech University. He is also an Adjunct Professor of International Health and Medical Communication with the University of Limerick in Ireland and an Adjunct Professor of Public Health at East Carolina University in North Carolina. He is an STC Fellow, and his main research interests are international communication—particularly in relation to health and medicine—and information design for global audiences.

Ann Wiley, an STC Fellow, is the long-time editor of the *Global Talk* newsletter and website of STC's International Technical Communication (ITC) SIG, a past manager of the ITC SIG, and currently manager of the Europe SIG. Ann has a Master's degree in library science and a PhD in instructional development, both from Syracuse University. She is president of Ann L. Wiley Consultants Inc., specializing in process design and communications, lean and focused documentation and training, and content management and facilitation of enterprise and collaborative websites.

Thank you, Ann and Kirk, for sharing your expertise with *Intercom* readers on this topic. Also in this issue are two columns, one on ethics from a project manager perspective and the other on writing for a North American audience from a student perspective; an interview with Summit Closing Keynote Speaker, David Beebe, by Nicky Bleiel; a listing of Summit sponsors and exhibitors; STC awards and honors; and information about the newly published *CPTC Foundation Study Guide*.

I encourage *Intercom* readers to consider writing something for an upcoming issue! Themes are posted online and we're always looking for Society Page, My Job, and Off Hours articles.

—Liz Pohland
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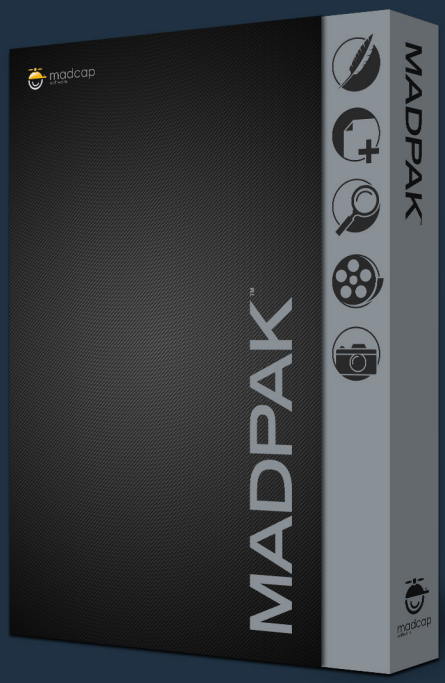

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The Six Contexts of Thinking Globally While Writing Locally

BY KIRK ST.AMANT and **ANN WILEY** |
Guest Editors

A GENERATION AGO, international communication was limited to the few who traveled abroad for business. Now, it is almost a matter of our daily routine. Today, translation and localization are standard aspects of the technical communication process, and the global spread of online media means technical communicators are increasingly working with colleagues and clients all over the world. As online media expand access to international markets, the need to address factors of international communication will only increase.

The New Communication Paradigm

Today, proximity is no longer essential to international communication. That is, one does not need to be located in the same physical space to interact with individuals in different nations. Rather, online access to a growing global population (some 3.3 billion persons) is only a click, swipe, or search away (Internet Usage Statistics). As this access continues to expand, the need for effective international communication will only grow. This new century thus represents an age when technical communicators must increasingly be *thinking globally while writing locally*.

This idea of "thinking globally" can be a bit overwhelming. After all, given the number of nations, languages, and cultures in the world, where should one begin when trying to understand such contexts? Add the fact that cultures evolve at different rates and in response to varying factors, and the situation can seem overwhelming. So what is the technical communicator to do?

No one, simple answer exists. As many of us are aware, attempts to address international interactions could fill libraries and vary from expert to expert. Additionally, recent research notes certain approaches often used to understand culture and communication are problematic and ill-suited to examine the more complex and nuanced nature of international communication today (Cardon; Yu). These factors have led to alternative approaches for understanding international communication. These new perspectives focus on communication design, parallel product (and documentation) creation, and dynamics of user experience vs. more conventional approaches connected to audience, converting of pre-existing materials, and ideas of a common context of use (Sun; Getto & St.Amant).

The Need for New Approaches

Our ability to communicate globally is changing. As it does, technical communicators need to re-think international communication to reflect the continually evolving contexts related to working with and designing for international users. Thinking globally must precede writing locally to create effective materials for a growing global constituency. Success involves understanding different factors that provide information on user expectations—and patterns of use—in international settings.

To this end, we propose six contexts technical communicators can focus on to better understand the design and communication expectations of users in different nations and from other cultures. These six contexts are:

- *Informational Context*—This context focuses on identifying the different venues in which technical communicators can learn about the backgrounds, perceptions, and expectations of users from different cultures. There is, for example, a temptation to simply go to existing sources to learn about a culture based upon what others have observed and written. The informational context asks technical communicators to go beyond these secondary sources and engage cultures more directly by examining the venues the members of a culture use to share ideas and information. In so doing, technical communicators must also adopt more open mindsets when interacting with individuals from or reviewing materials created by other cultures. This combination of expanded resources and open attitudes can help technical communicators better understand what prompts different communication behaviors and expectations.
- *Technological Context*—This context encompasses both the technologies cultures use to interact and how members of a culture use a technology to share information and achieve objectives. This technical context can involve the technologies technical communicators might employ when collaborating with colleagues in other cultures. It could also include the technologies for which technical communicators need to

develop corresponding documentation to meet the needs of different international users. The idea is to challenge the assumptions, "we all use the same technologies" or "we all use the same technologies in the same ways."

- *Positional Context*—The physical setting in which individuals use a particular device or product can affect expectations of and patterns of use. Understanding such positional context is important, for members of the same culture might have different expectations of a product depending on where they are located when using it. Thus, designing for members of a culture involves knowing more than the culture itself; it also involves knowing where individuals are when using a product. Once technical communicators know these two factors, they can design materials that better address the different physical locations in which individuals use them.
- *Experiential Context*—Use is connected to life experience and to daily routines. It is not enough to know who will use a given product. Technical communicators must also know how a given item fits into the daily experiences of a group of users. This experiential knowledge can then guide design practices associated with developing materials that better meet expectations. To this end, the better technical communicators can understand (and map) the daily experiences of users from a given culture, the more effectively they can design materials that address—and can be used effectively in—such contexts.
- *Professional Context*—In many cases, technical communicators develop materials for products used in certain professional settings. In other instances, they interact with clients or colleagues in a range of professional environments to achieve different objectives. These professional contexts, however, are not inert. Rather, they bring with them different expectations of what each individual is assumed to know and do in relation to that context. These factors, however, are not universal; rather, they can vary from culture to culture. To this end, the more technical communicators know about the professional backgrounds and related workplace expectations of individuals from other cultures, the more effectively they can interact with them in professional contexts and the more effectively they can design materials for such contexts.
- *Educational Context*—The education individuals receive influences their perceptions and uses of the items they encounter. These educational experiences also shape how individuals interact with others in a range of settings. The more technical communicators know about the educational contexts that shape such perspectives, the better they can design for such contexts. An understanding of such contexts can also help technical communicators work more effectively with individuals trained in particular educational settings.

Each of these contexts examines how cultures develop different foundations for perceiving and interacting with the world around them. They also provide a mechanism for helping us better understand other cultures. These contexts, moreover, often overlap in different ways and affect expectations and uses of a device, an interface, or a text. By understanding these contexts, technical communicators can better research and more effectively work with or design for users from other nations and cultures.

The Contents of This Issue

Each article in this issue represents an example of these six contexts. The ideas and approaches in these entries provide items to consider or approaches to use when applying this contextual framework to thinking globally while writing locally.

The first entry, by Benjamin Lauren, presents strategies for examining informational contexts to learn about, learn from, and interact with individuals from other cultures. These strategies can facilitate understanding of cultural groups through interaction and by reviewing how groups communicate. The second entry, Clint Lanier's article on open-source software (OSS), examines technological contexts by reviewing international situations in which technical communicators might work with OSS developers from different nations to create documentation for software users from other cultures.

In the issue's third article, Filipp Sapienza examines positional context by discussing how immigration creates new settings to consider when developing materials for the members of a culture. Sapienza notes how the context in which immigrants live often means developing materials different from those used by individuals still living in the home country. Next, Gustav Verhulsdonck explains how the concept of personas can help technical communicators understand the expectations of users in different cultures. Verhulsdonck reviews how personas help with understanding the daily routines of individuals from different cultures and the contexts in which those persons use information, where, when, and how.

As noted, professional contexts affect the expectations individuals bring to business interactions, and Han Yu and Melanie G. Flanders examine such factors by reviewing technical communication practices in the People's Republic of China (China). The two also note the close connections between translation and technical communication in China and summarize common processes Chinese organizations use to generate product documentation. In the issue's final entry, Yvonne Cleary and Darina M. Slattery examine educational contexts affecting technical communication in international settings. They do so by reviewing collaborative projects used to train technical communication and translation students in Ireland, the United States, and France. Cleary and

Slattery also offer suggestions on how educators and industry practitioners in technical communication can participate in such international educational projects.

In examining these ideas, the six entries reveal how certain contextual factors shape and provide insights into international communication practices. They also offer examples of how to approach such contexts and apply related ideas when investigating connections between culture and communication.

The Next Steps

Thinking globally while writing locally is not easy. Success involves understanding users and the contexts in which they gain access to and employ materials. The six-context framework reflected by the entries in this issue represents one perspective on how to approach culture and communication. Thus, the ideas covered here are not meant to be final, definitive ones. Rather, they should prompt readers to ask questions and engage in their own examinations of contextual factors affecting how we design for users from other cultures. By considering, applying, and enhancing these ideas of context, technical communicators can develop the flexible, responsive, and adaptable methods needed to effectively think globally while writing locally.

In sum, this issue is an invitation to engage in a greater discussion of these issues and ideas. We, the editors, look forward to how this conversation will proceed from here!

—Kirk St.Amant and Ann Wiley
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International Audiences and Cultures

By BENJAMIN LAUREN

TODAY, TECHNICAL COMMUNICATORS might find themselves developing communication products for persons from other cultures. Yet international audiences and contexts can be incredibly nuanced. As a result, developing technologies for such individuals and conditions can be complex. For example, WhatsApp©, a popular instant messaging mobile application with a global reach, has an audience that crosses several time zones. Many of the app's users, however, employ different mobile services, platforms, and devices, while also subject to their country's intellectual property laws.

Further complicating this situation is that cultures can use communication technologies, like mobile apps, in unpredictable ways. Consider how different cultures and people view "selfies." In some cultures, they are seen as a form of self-expression, while in others, they are considered evidence of narcissism. Given such complexity, how can technical communicators effectively develop materials for international audiences and contexts?

That's a challenging question with no simple answer. Yet technical communicators must keep searching for methods, strategies, and practices for engaging with international audiences to keep pace with changing technologies and evolving cultural communication practices. The key to success is often connected to the attitude—or the state of being—technical communicators bring to such contexts.

Be Curious: Remember that You Don't Know What You Don't Know

The obvious way to learn about international contexts is to do research, but what sort? Technical communicators can learn a surprising amount from a Web search (e.g., current trends in pop culture, events, humor, news, politics, and so on across the world). Additionally, online platforms run by newspapers, multimedia services, and sports and news channels can offer culturally useful information to help introduce individuals to cultural norms, beliefs, and attitudes.

For example, while reading the replies to an article on ESPN might reveal some ugly behavior (e.g., trolling), these replies also provide examples of how conversations about sports are valued by a particular audience in a given culture. Knowing these values exist can help one better understand how cultures view participation in a variety of communities and contexts. Such venues also provide a mechanism for examining questions such as, "How else do people in this culture communicate online?" and "What sort of communication channels are being used?" Thus, engaging with cultures online can foster discovery and learning in unexpected ways.

Within these contexts, *heuristics* can provide a practical starting point for approaching international audiences. Heuristics are guidelines for evaluating or designing an unfamiliar topic, process, or audience, and experts in a given area often create them. They are also useful for beginners who are just learning how to evaluate an interface or understand an unfamiliar culture. For example, national cultural identity heuristics were created from extensive research done by Geert Hofstede. Hofstede's research describes dimensions of culture such as power distance (i.e., how the culture views hierarchy and power) and individuality (i.e., how the culture views individualism versus collectivism).

A word of caution: use heuristics strategically, but skeptically. While cultural identity heuristics can be useful, they can also overlook individuality. The relationship of individuals with their national culture varies from person to person and can constantly change with time. Not all Americans, for example, are individualistic, and not all Chinese are collectivist (a common assumption under the heuristic of cultural dimensions). The key is to remember that heuristics address national tendencies, not immutable truths.

Be People-Centered: Focus on Problems, not Products

A technical communicator's research might begin by understanding the problems that affect people *in* a given culture vs. focusing on developing products *for* that culture. By emphasizing problem solving, technical communicators can position the user in the center of the development process. As a field, technical communicators already instinctively advocate for users, so it follows that we would do the same when developing technologies in international contexts. To focus on problem solving, Bill Hart-Davidson suggests looking for low-fidelity activities (i.e., out-of-date or low-performing technologies) and designing high-fidelity solutions (i.e., updated or high-performing technologies) that improve a person's ability to complete a given task or procedure.

Gina Kolata provides an internationally relevant example of this approach in her work on recent advancements in the treatment of heart attack patients. Today, when an emergency medical provider attaches EKG leads to the chest of a cardiac patient, the results of that EKG are transmitted automatically to the nearest hospital. At that hospital, a doctor can immediately access the EKG results and begin preparing an appropriate treatment. Previously, an EKG would not be seen until the emergency vehicle reached the hospital, dramatically slowing medical intervention. In this example, a low-fidelity technology was replaced with a high-fidelity one, creating a more patient-centered approach—one that greatly improves chances of survival for heart attack victims.

When looking to augment people's activities in international contexts, technical communicators must consider cultural norms and perspectives. The following is a series of questions one might seek to answer in order to understand such norms:

- How will changing this technology improve people's lives?
- How could this intervention hurt people?
- Does my solution respect cultural practices, beliefs, and attitudes toward a given activity?
- Are my solutions informed by users' cultural context or my own cultural context?

The answers to these questions can help technical communicators design technologies and products that best meet the needs and expectations (and preferences) of different cultural groups. And an effective way to answer these questions is by doing user research.

A research-based approach can help technical communicators assemble a broader understanding of people's experiences in international contexts. (The word "experience," in fact, emphasizes assembling a holistic view of how people interact with a technology or activity rather than a more systems-focused view.) Technical communicators must therefore learn how the current experience of trying to complete a task might fail to align with people's desired experience.

The central idea to remember is cultural attitudes toward technology vary. So, inventing a new mobile application, for instance, might not actually solve a problem. Rather, it might add a new layer of complexity that confounds a situation further. Moreover, as technologies and cultures evolve, people's needs and goals change as well. Technologies meant for international audiences that do not consider people's experiences—and how they change and evolve over time—can quickly become obsolete or unused.

Be Methodical: Use People-Centered Discovery Methods

There are several methods technical communicators can use to understand people's experiences when completing an activity in international contexts. What follows are three examples I find applicable (although it should be noted many others exist):

- *Experience Maps* are an umbrella term for holistic methods of understanding experiences with a company. An example of an experience map is a customer journey map. In international contexts, a customer's journey can vary in unpredictable ways. In some cultures, decisions about medical intervention might first be discussed with family or with a religious leader instead of visiting a medical doctor. Using experience maps affords technical communicators the ability to assemble a bigger picture of how people interact with a technology and understand emotional responses to pain points.
- *Proto-personas and Personas* represent a profile of customers, which help technical communicators learn about their audience's needs, habits, and backgrounds. Understanding audience is especially important in international contexts, where a user's needs, habits, and background can be different from your own. Proto-personas are not based on research; rather, they represent an educated guess made by an informed person or team. Personas, on the other hand, are usually developed through research involving a mix of data collected quantitatively (e.g., surveys) and qualitatively (e.g., ethnographic observations).
- *User Research* is conducted before a system has been developed, whereas usability testing focuses more on the development of an existing system. Usability testing of an already developed product is still important, but you should try to learn as much as possible about how individuals use a technology before designing a system—and then developing the technology to meet such patterns of use. User research can take many forms including surveys, interviews, observations, activity analysis, and behavior modeling. Cultures respond to user research differently, so you must carefully think through how these methods will be received by international audiences. Some cultures, for example, might respond to think-aloud protocol negatively or just not engage as expected.

A methodical approach based on user research can save time, money, and a great deal of frustration for technical communicators or their companies or clients. For this reason, technical communicators should try to learn as

much as possible about their users and the users' cultural context before designing for them.

Be Attentive: Pursue Continuous Development

Solutions to today's problems are often temporary. Products, services, and experiences must continuously develop. One of the best ways to prepare for these changes is for technical communicators to engage with users—or the persons who will use their products. To do so, technical communicators must continuously work to understand how people use technologies, especially in international contexts.

To engage in continuous development, technical communicators should adopt *iterative approaches* to information design. Such approaches focus on continuing change based on feedback. They also create room for users to test products, provide feedback, and help guide future development of a product. Using iterative development, technical communicators work with users to test prototypes or existing products, analyze the results of the tests, and redesign the technology where appropriate. Iterative approaches can also make technologies more culturally appropriate and useful for users.

Because people's experience is a work in progress, the data provided by user research must be continuously updated. Technical communicators can do this work by collecting, analyzing, and interpreting new data through processes such as interviewing, surveying, and contextual inquiry. In this way, continuous technology development is a process of discovery aimed at understanding how international contexts and audiences continue to shift.

Be Empathetic: Create Spaces for Dialogue

Technical communicators have to constantly learn new ways to engage with people in international contexts. Sometimes this means creating spaces for dialogue where the main goal is to listen and learn from others. Being a good listener can be surprisingly challenging because cultures communicate in different ways. Individuals from the United States, for example, might be more direct in stating a problem during user testing, while users from India might take a more indirect approach toward criticizing a problematic feature. In fact, research by Vatrapu and Pérez-Quiñones suggests the cultural identity of a usability moderator can influence how people respond during a test. An empathic mindset helps technical communicators to better understand these nuances without passing judgment on individuals or their culture, or worse, relying on stereotypes to guide one's thinking about international audiences.

To practice empathy, technical communicators can begin by understanding their own cultural norms and attitudes, and how others might view them. For example, a professor from China once visited my technical communication class. I asked for his business card and as he handed it to me, I immediately put it in my wallet. He frowned but remained polite. When I handed him my business card, he took it with both hands and looked it over carefully. He held the card in his hands until our interaction ended. Later, the professor's chaperone explained he was trying to show respect by carefully reading over my business card. By putting his business card in my wallet so quickly, I inadvertently showed him disrespect.

An empathic mindset requires a person to look inward. Technical communicators can practice empathy by being reflective about attitudes toward different cultures and ways of working, especially as their own reactions to unfamiliar cultures influence their approach to technology design. Sometimes the spaces needed to support dialogue must exist internally at a company, or even in an individual's mind.

Be Excited: Seek Opportunities and Learn

This entry reviewed general approaches for gaining an initial understanding about developing materials for international audiences and contexts. One of the thrilling things about being a technical communicator today is that individuals must constantly learn and relearn ways of communicating. Technology changes, products and platforms evolve, audiences shift, or problems that seem impossible to solve one day seem less overwhelming the next. Technical communicators can look at these challenges as either opportunities to learn, or impediments that frustrate.

Designing technologies for international audiences and contexts is no different. It comes with a set of challenges that can teach an individual a great deal about the field and about people. There is certainly much more one can learn about creating technology for international contexts and users. In the end, it's a matter of the state of being one wishes to adopt. By being curious, people centered, methodical, attentive, empathetic, and excited, technical communicators will find new and incredibly rewarding technology opportunities await.

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Implications for Technical Communication in the Rise of

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International Open Source Software Use

By CLINT LANIER | *Senior Member*

OPEN SOURCE SOFTWARE (OSS) is often defined as software that is both made available to the public without cost and made available for the public to copy and to modify. This openness means the size of an OSS project can range from small and one-time software applications, such as various OSS apps and plugins, to large, ongoing endeavors, such as the Linux operating system or the Mozilla Firefox Web browser.

The collaborative and open nature of OSS means contributors to OSS projects generally span the entire globe. In fact, the Red Hat/Georgia Tech Open Source Index Project noted in 2009 that the three countries with the most OSS activity at that time were (in order) China, Japan, and Brazil (Lanier, 2011). This international aspect is important because use of OSS systems by professional organizations has risen 36% over the past decade. As a survey of professionals in the IT industry by the OSS logistics firm Black Duck Software notes, "Seventy-eight percent of respondents said their companies run part or all of its operations on OSS and 66 percent said their company creates software for customers built on open source."

These numbers suggest current and future software activity will be dominated by collaborative actions taking place in global contexts and involving participants from a variety of cultures. For technical writers, the implications are enormous and being ready for them will be central to professional success over time.

Traditional Documentation

From a technical communication perspective, one of the biggest issues surrounding international OSS adoption and use is a corresponding lack of quality—or even complete—documentation for software products. In fact, according to a 2013 article by *Linux Insider*, documentation ranks as one of the foremost complaints associated with OSS use (Germain, 2013). The reason for a lack of documentation quality seems to be that the individuals developing the software see little worth in pursuing aspects not concerned with coding. This perspective, in fact, tends to dominate OSS projects—many of which are driven by volunteer programmers working in their spare time.

Further complicating this situation is the fact that many contributors to OSS projects are potentially from different cultures and speak English as their second or maybe third language (if at all). Because OSS most often uses English as the central language contributors/developers use to interact, the potential for "bad" documentation is enhanced exponentially. There is, therefore, an urgent need for technical communication professionals to step into this void and contribute to the documentation efforts of international OSS projects. In fact, a failure to do so can markedly affect how widely used an effective OSS product might be on both domestic and international levels. Technical communicators can adopt certain strategies to address this documentation need effectively in global contexts.

Strategy 1: Creating and Translating End-User Documentation

The most obvious task for technical communicators is creating documentation for a range of international end users. While international use of OSS is growing, there remains a lack of effective documentation for users from different cultures. Here I am not speaking about large, well-coordinated and old projects like Mozilla or Linux, but rather smaller, more recent projects—many of which have the potential to affect practices on a global scale.

Another related task would involve coordinating or facilitating the translation of existing documentation and of the documentation being developed by technical communicators. As coordinating the translation of documentation (e.g., locating and working with a translator) is a process often coordinated by technical communicators, these individuals would seem ideally poised to oversee such practices for globally distributed OSS projects. This situation can be true for translating other languages into English (e.g., Spanish to English) or translating English-language documentation into other languages (e.g., English into Russian). When it comes to OSS projects, the need to coordinate both kinds of translation is great.

Strategy 2: Editing Existing Documentation

English-language documentation written by nonnative English speakers might contain problematic errors—particularly if the individuals creating the documentation are doing it as an afterthought, while developing the product, or in haste. As a result, such documentation could contain many basic errors in grammar, structure, or spelling. Such

errors could, at a minimum, undercut the credibility of OSS products associated with such documentation; in a worst-case scenario, they could be so bad that they affect the use of—or impede the effective use of—the related software. In these cases, technical communication professionals can help by editing such documentation to reduce errors and enhance the usability of both the documentation and the related OSS product. Moreover, editing can help with the later translation of such documents by reducing the need for translators to query an author to request clarification on what idea the writer wishes to convey in a particular problematic passage.

Strategy 3: Developing Multiple Types of Deliverables

In terms of deliverables, OSS documentation, if it exists, is often available in only limited formats. Sometimes it could be a PDF file downloaded with the software; in other cases, it might be in the form of an FAQ sheet someone has set on the development website. And in certain cases, if the OSS effort is mature and very well coordinated, the software will include a linked set of context-sensitive help files designed to facilitate effective use. Rarely, however, especially in the smaller projects, have I seen all three.

In the case of Strategy 3, technical communicators might be asked to help implement their single-sourcing expertise to deliver information in multiple formats (e.g., PDF-based documentation, online FAQs, and links embedded into the software itself). In truth, end users might need a variety of documentation types to help them successfully install, effectively run, and generally operate an OSS product. Therefore, technical communicators could convert existing documentation to multiple formats, such as embedded help systems or online docs. Technical communicators might also create useful Web-based tutorials (videos or text), comprehensive FAQs, or simple print-and-downloadable user guides. Doing so requires one to understand the needs of an international audience and the conditions under which the members of such an audience would be accessing and using such software (a classic need for understanding user experience design). To address such global needs, technical communicators must research audiences from different countries and cultures in order to develop the approaches needed to convey information and instructions effectively to such users.

Other Forms of User Assistance

The other area that might have implications for technical communicators concerns nontraditional documentation methods, specifically user forums. There is a growing use of peer-to-peer (P2P) user forums as support mechanisms for OSS. In fact, these forums seem to be the de facto user support—a form of hybrid documentation—used for a number of OSS projects, where they are of obvious importance to OSS developers. It may be that such forums have become a standard method for providing support. It certainly is more convenient when communities of users can answer each other's questions rather than relying on the developers.

The mechanisms for making forums available, such as the leading forum software, phpBB, are also usually free and easily created and integrated into projects. In fact, GitHub, the leading hub of OSS projects typically used as the repository for projects by developers, has a forum/messaging capability already built into it (see "Further Resources" for helpful information about forums).

It has been suggested that technical communicators could carve out new roles for themselves as moderators of such forums. After all, such forums may represent an ideal type of user assistance as they answer users' questions that documentation writers may have never thought of. (In essence, they are a kind of customizable help function.) Within this context, technical communicators could navigate such forums to help users find the appropriate answers for their questions. Technical communicators could also review such forums with the goal of aggregating correct information for the community, and (provided they have the proper access) these technical communicators could correct posts, either language or technical information, created by other users.

In international contexts so common to OSS, technical communicators will need to be sensitive to cultural communication differences (discussed more in the next section). In sum, they must be able to use online forums as a mechanism to communicate effectively with people who could have limited ability to communicate in or read English. Additionally, technical communicators would have to be aware of—and address—a range of variables (from culture and language to economy and infrastructure) that could affect when and how individuals from other cultures and in other nations use online forums to ask questions and obtain answers or instructions.

Strategies for Working on International Aspects of OSS

As global OSS use continues to increase, it stands to reason that technical communicators will likely be involved in some of these projects. The question becomes, what can they do to work effectively in such contexts? While success will likely be based on a case-by-case situation, there are three general strategies that can be of help in the context of most international OSS projects.

Strategy 1: Understand Cultural Differences

Because many users of OSS will likely be from nations other than the United States, technical communicators will need to have an initial understanding of cultural differences, especially in the way people communicate online. In some cultures, for example, individuals might expect very detailed and explicit instruction; in others, users might need a thorough explanations of abstract concepts before they fully understand a point or direction. In some cases, users might require much less information and only rely

on the abstract concept to guide them. While our first instinct is to attribute these differences to user knowledge or level of experience, there is evidence that they may in fact be related to the different cultures that people come from. These cultures have different ways of communicating that must be understood. For the technical communicator, the key is to research the cultures for which one might be generating documentation, learn the preferred communication preferences of individuals in that culture, and then create documentation that meets those expectations. It is a case of "knowledge is power," and the more the technical communicator knows about a given cultural audience, the more empowered the technical communicator will be to help meet the information-seeking needs of that audience.

Strategy 2: Use Precise Language

To better assist international users, there will also be a greater need to practice more precise writing in OSS documentation. This writing should be drawn from the instruction given in the practice of Simplified Technical English (STE). The practice of STE prefers language for technical documentation that (among other things) uses few synonyms and uses words that are easily translatable without confusion. The classic example would be to say that doing something is "difficult" instead of saying it is "hard" because the word "hard" could describe the density of an object, not the complexity of a task. Thus, the more precise word "difficult" lends to more accessible communication for users with limited English skills (see "Further Resources" for helpful information about culture and communication). For technical communicators working on international OSS projects, the key to success is to familiarize themselves with these practices in advance of working on such projects.

Strategy 3: Garner Support from Organization

Technical communicators will likely also need the support of their employers to contribute to OSS projects, as OSS work is often performed by dedicated volunteers and for free. This situation might not be so difficult or far-fetched. As noted, a study by Black Duck Software found 64% of respondents said their companies participate in OSS projects already (mainly because their companies build on the software for their own purposes). Whether they are already contributing to the documentation or user-assistance efforts is unclear. It should be a matter of practice, however, that when the software project is improved, it is done so not only through effective programming, but also through effective user assistance—a process that would benefit the international population of users.

These are only a few items technical communicators should consider in light of the global spread of OSS use. One thing is for sure, as more nations gain Internet access and more cultures interact in the global economy, the need for and the use of OSS products will only increase. For technical communicators, this factor will likely mean increased work with international colleagues and clients who rely on OSS products to interact and engage in various business-related activities. By understanding some of the dynamics of documentation practices associated with international OSS projects, technical communicators can better ensure their success in such contexts.

Further Resources

For more information about OSS and its history, see the following sources:

- Open Source Initiative (*https://opensource.org/*)
- Infosource Special Section on Open Source (*www.infoworld.com/blog/open-sources*)
- Opensource.com (*https://opensource.com/*)

For more information about forum software, its availability and use in OSS projects, see the following:

- phpBB Free and Open Source Forums (*https://www.phpbb.com/*)
- GitHub Software Creation Community (*https://github.com/*)
- Myths and Realities About Online Forums in Open Source Software Development: An Empirical Study (*http://benthamopen.com/ABSTRACT/TOSEJ-4-52*)

For more information about culture and communication, see the following:

- Communicating Across Cultures (*www.asme.org/engineering-topics/articles/business-communication/communicating-across-cultures*)
- Rhetoric, Professional Communication and Globalization (*www.rpcg.org*)

For more information about precise language use, see the following:

- ASD Simplified Technical English (*www.asd-ste100.org/index.html*)

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User Experience Design for Immigrant Populations

BY FILIPP SAPIENZA | *Member* (Dedicated to Nathaniel)

ACCORDING TO A 2015 United Nations report, there are more than 230 million immigrants worldwide (United Nations International Migration Report). And within popular technical communication and user experience (UX) markets, immigrant users represent significant populations. The most recent statistics, for example, report over 41 million immigrants living in the United States, or approximately 13% of the total population (Migration Policy Institute), while Western Europe contains 33.5 million individuals born outside of the European Union (Eurostat). Thus, immigrants represent important and growing populations that need to be considered in relation to technical communication and UX practices.

Creators of digital content for immigrants, however, face situations that cannot readily be addressed through traditional cross-cultural development methods. These traditional processes emphasize the translation of websites for individuals from a culture different from that of the developers. Yet when creating materials for immigrant populations in the same nation, developers must understand not only cultural differences, but also *how distinct immigrant cultures mingle and interact* in the host society. Because immigrants balance multiple cultural identities, content creators need to focus on bringing the multiple facets of immigrant identity together.

This article details three principles UX developers can implement to create websites tailored to the multiple cultural identities of immigrant users. These principles are to:

- Analyze and apply schemes from websites created by the immigrants themselves;
- Transcreate content, layout, and navigation according to the multiple cultural experience of users; and
- Rework user analysis and test protocols to aid immigrant users.

This three-part approach allows UX developers in technical communication to focus on areas essential to creating materials for individuals from one culture, but living in another.

Analyze and Apply Techniques on Immigrant Websites

The path of immigration is often difficult, sometimes perilous, and always fraught with profound challenges of getting around in a completely new society. To mitigate these challenges, immigrants access immigrant websites (also called *diasporic* or *virtual immigrant communities*) that help them adjust to life in the new nation in which they have relocated. These sites contain resources that help immigrants find others from their original societies in the new country.

Diasporic sites include links to professionals who speak the immigrants' native language, information about local ethnic stores, and opportunities to socialize online with others (for an example, visit *www.russianseattle.com*). These resources are often created at a grass-roots level by the immigrants themselves and for other immigrants. Moreover, government agencies are also seeking to develop resources to help immigrants gain access to health and government services. (For an example, see the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Latino healthcare website at *www.cuidadodesalud.gov/es/*.)

In my own work with Russian immigrants in the United States, I have found that virtual diasporas provide insights on how combining cultures takes place. For example, the website *www.russianseattle.com* has Russian artistic and literary content as well as links to Russian media. The design of the site is in the Russian language and features muted grey, white, scarlet, and blue colors common on the Russian national flag and on other Russian sites. The central picture on the site, however, features a shot of the Seattle space needle, an American symbol.

A closer inspection of the site shows more cultural mixing. The стол справок (information desk) page

contains links to American and Russian resources written in both Russian and English. Прогулки по Интернету (A Stroll through the Internet) juxtaposes American and corresponding Russian search engines side by side in table format. The title of Русские бизнесы (Russian businesses) page has been Americanized into "Russian Yellow Pages of Business," providing links to local Russian-speaking doctors, lawyers, accountants, and others.

Opportunities for connectivity with fellow immigrants should be taken to heart by developers. Connectivity is highly valued by immigrants, and as such, provision of it increases the credibility of the site. On the Russian Seattle site, a forum and associated Facebook page (*www.facebook.com/groups/SeattleRU/*) offer opportunities for users to connect with each other.

Virtual diasporas also serve as counterparts to local ethnic communities where immigrants shop, dine, and socialize. Developers will benefit by visiting the communities (e.g., Brighton Beach, Little Italy, and Chinatown in New York) that inspire the websites in order to gain additional clues as to the aesthetic, literary, culinary, communal, and geographic dimensions of the group.

Transcreate Content, Layout, and Navigation

When working with immigrants, one might believe that translation is not necessary. Because immigrants must learn the language and habits of the new society, what is the point? The research suggests otherwise. In addition to translation, immigrants seem to respond positively to websites that have been *transcreated*.

As Silvia Inez Salazar writes, *transcreation* includes both language translation and bringing into focus traditional cultural values through photos, color, organization, and so forth. For immigrants, transcreated culture is a hybrid of original and new cultural elements. One culture is not excluded; rather, it is mixed in with other cultural influences.

On *russianseattle.com*, the Еврейская жизнь (Jewish life) link provides an example of transcreation. Content is available in both English and Russian and, in some cases, Hebrew. The developers combine content through a consistent interface widget: a carousel on the portal lets users rotate through pictorial links sensitive to Russian, American, and Jewish interests, yet they do so in a way that does not disturb the larger organization of the site.

This combination of interface standards established in the west with content of the original culture also turns up in my work with Mexican-American users. Participants compared American, Mexican-American, and Mexican city and food sites. The Mexican immigrants performed tasks better when using websites with content that highlights Mexican culture, but that have organizational and interface elements more common on American websites. They also rated such sites more highly than those that focused only on one culture or the other.

For these users, transcreation involves not only the development of content and aesthetics, but also reaches deep into the interface and navigation. UX developers must therefore keep in mind that immigrants' cultural preferences extend to structural site elements. Through comparative analysis of existing sites with actual users, developers can separate and identify the elements that users value most.

The key is to assess how users select the interface elements they like best. Doing so involves identifying things like:

- What kind of text and what language(s) are preferred? Equally important, how to select the language?
- How best to organize the site layout?
- How to order chunks of information?
- What types of navigation to deploy?
- What color(s) to use for links and menu items?

Modify User-Research Protocols

I once did a study involving immigrant users from Malaysia. The study required an equal distribution of male and female participants to design effective materials. Religious customs for some participants, however, specified that female participants could not attend a test session by themselves. As test facilitator, I found myself asking questions like:

- Would individual user data from these participants have to be qualified in reporting?
- Would users with this requirement need to be omitted from analysis?
- Would qualification of or omitting these users compromise the integrity of the results?

These issues pose challenges to established user-testing protocols. The question for the UX specialist thus becomes, "How does one garner accurate data on user behavior when testing situations differ from participant to participant?"

Another challenge to protocols happens in the screening and selecting phase. User studies typically require participants to submit background information. Yet immigrants are often fearful of providing this information. In my studies, some of the immigrants from Russia expressed concern that word of immigration may get back to their countries of origin, and that authorities there may take retribution against family members. Mexican participants were reluctant to share the rationale for not providing background information, but it may be assumed that their fears stem from the ongoing uncertainty over U.S. immigration policy.

With certain populations, the process of ethnic identification can become complicated. Some Russian-American immigrants, for example, identify themselves as "Russian American" even though they are technically not Russian, having come from former states of the Soviet Union with large populations of Russian speakers (e.g., Ukraine, Belarus, and Latvia). In other cases, immigrants from these nations hold ambivalent attitudes toward Russian culture and society due to political tensions. As a result, they define themselves in religious and ethnic terms first (e.g., indigenous, Ukrainian Russian, Muslim, Tajik, etc.) and as Russian American second.

Because of the sensitivity with which participants might embrace or reject an identity classification, UX specialists

need to allow for leeway during the processes of screening and selecting prospective users. UX developers should consider letting participants define how they fit into certain categories.

Protocols for interacting with immigrant users can also be complex, for culture shapes peoples' perception of relationships. Some participants asked me for personal advice on where to find laundromats and the best place to send their toddlers to day care. In these instances, participants responded to me positively after I gave them the information. Even though I still consider myself a student of the Russian and Spanish languages, I nonetheless found that trying to speak to participants in their original languages made them feel relaxed and more open to sharing.

It is at points such as these that an understanding of the culture of the immigrants becomes important. Both Russian and Mexican cultures have strong traditions of establishing trust through interpersonal relationships and informal networks rather than through institutions and bureaucracies.

I recognized that my manner of responding might have altered performance metrics. However, sticking to a strict protocol might have made participants too anxious to provide honest feedback about the sites they were testing. Allowing participants to use their original language to perform tests, complete forms, and air feedback precluded the apprehension that an immigrant sometimes experiences when trying to use a language—English—that they feel less comfortable speaking.

Take Aways

Cultural issues play an important role in the development of usable content for immigrants. These groups use websites in ways that combine more than one culture. Web development should therefore incorporate the multiple cultural influences of immigrant audience because:

- By analyzing existing immigrant websites, online content creators can see how different cultures are brought together in action.
- By transcreating content, layout, and navigation, Web developers will better serve the interface requirements of immigrants.
- By modifying and relaxing user analysis protocols, UX specialists will better meet the "face" needs of the immigrant audience.

UX developers can often trace design issues to a cultural source. They will therefore benefit from a deep knowledge of the historical and sociological patterns of the group for which they are developing content. Go beyond the established usability practice for global communication and consult local sources (for example, individuals in a local ethnic community) for insight, and be prepared to modify your approach accordingly. (See the References and Further Resources sections at the end of this article.) Toward this end, content development can greatly benefit by including individuals who are members of the same ethnic group in the design and development processes.

Immigration is hugely important, not just to the United States, but to many countries. As immigrant and multi-ethnic users grow in importance and number, UX developers will do well to devise innovative approaches that account for the diverse cultural and practical needs of these individuals. The ideas and approaches presented here can provide a starting point from which UX professionals can further investigate the expectations of these cultural groups.

Further Resources

- The Pew Research Center (*www.pewresearch.org/topics/immigration/*), for surveys and data on immigration trends to the United States.
- *Digital Diasporas* by Jennifer Brinkerhoff (2009) offers case studies of virtual immigrant communities.
- Irina Shklovskii, Janet Vertesi, and Silvia Lindtner. 2014. Introduction to This Special Issue on Transnational HCI. *Human-Computer Interaction* 29: 1–21. (A special issue that outlines a growing subdiscipline in UX development called *transnational HCI*.)
- *Enrique's Journey* by Sonia Nazario (2007). An example of a personal narrative—a genre that is abundant in popular literature.

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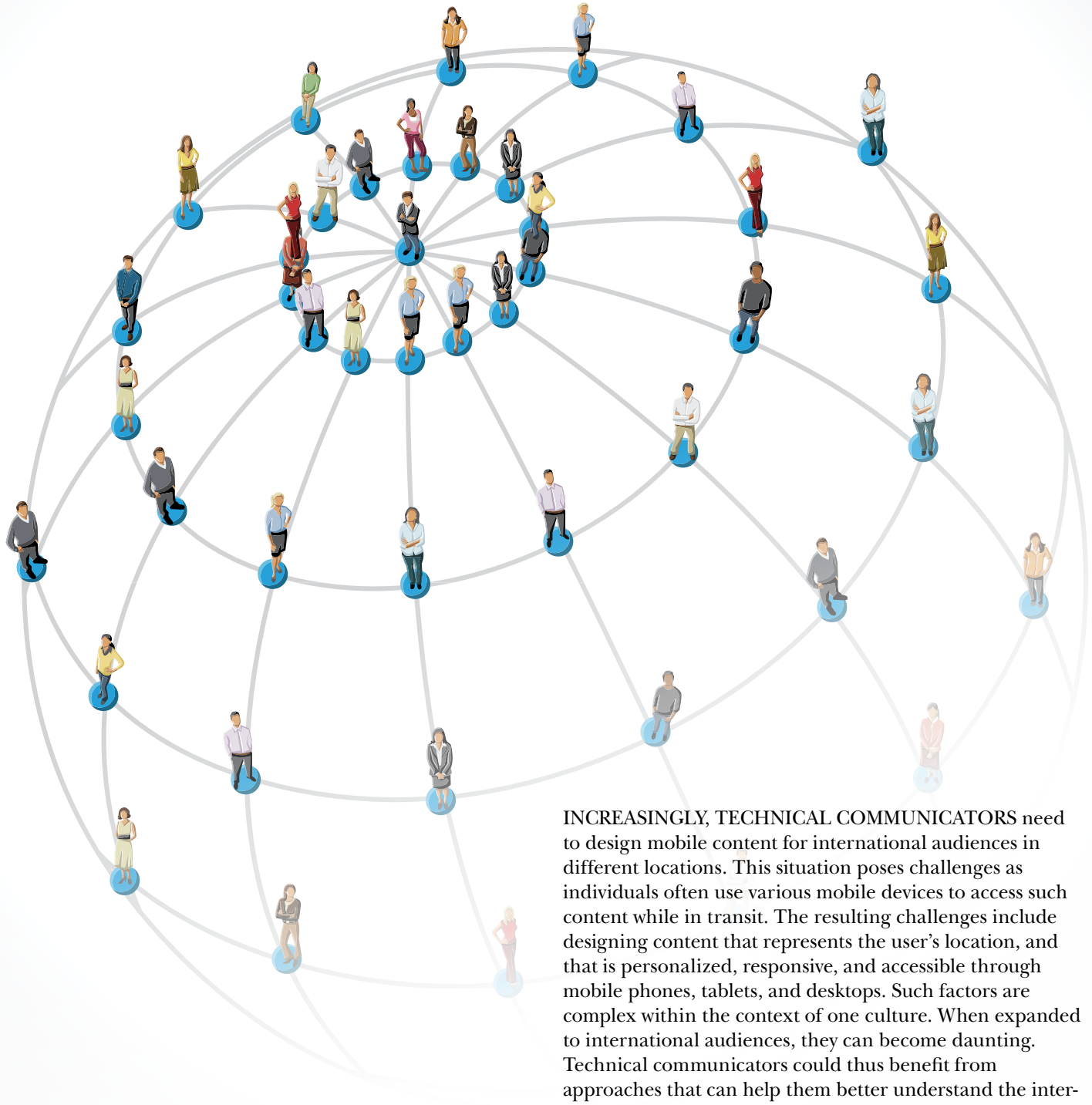
Creating Personas for International Audiences

By GUSTAV VERHULSDONCK



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INCREASINGLY, TECHNICAL COMMUNICATORS need to design mobile content for international audiences in different locations. This situation poses challenges as individuals often use various mobile devices to access such content while in transit. The resulting challenges include designing content that represents the user's location, and that is personalized, responsive, and accessible through mobile phones, tablets, and desktops. Such factors are complex within the context of one culture. When expanded to international audiences, they can become daunting. Technical communicators could thus benefit from approaches that can help them better understand the international contexts in which individuals use mobile devices.

Personas can offer a solution to such situations. In essence, personas are composite characters based on data about typical users, but written up to describe a fictional character (with a name, age, likes/dislikes, attitudes, needs, values and goals). Personas can help technical communicators better understand international users, for they provide a practical approach to understanding how certain users in a given culture might respond to a particular design. As such, they let technical communicators move beyond cultural generalizations when designing materials for international audiences.

What are personas?

Personas are rich, detailed characterizations of users, and they help technical communicators develop more robust designs of products like interfaces. The concept of a persona was devised by interface design pioneer Alan Cooper when he noticed how designers would often base design choices on what they thought a potential user *might do*, while not attending to what actual users *did* in their designs. In the design process, personas are written out characters with their own backstory of specific skills, emotions, attitudes, physical environment, and specific goals (Nielsen, 2014). By focusing on such details, personas allow technical communicators to think beyond typical user-scenarios and consider the concrete elements that might affect given users during the course of their day. Personas thus help individuals create better designs by considering the skills, feelings, ideas, physical contexts, and outcomes of very specific, demanding audiences—their personas.

The benefit of personas is that they help technical communicators to:

- Develop a stronger focus on specific user goals;
- Consider a design as located in a specific physical context;
- Develop a better understanding of the diverse purposes for using a design; and
- Make better design decisions overall by considering the multiple uses of a design.

In other words, personas allow technical communicators to expand the function of their design by getting them to think in terms of how their persona would approach the design in a specific context or situation (e.g., using an app that provides driving directions while driving vs. while sitting in one's home).

How are personas created?

In the software industry, personas are often used as a "lens" to test how a given group of individuals might use a particular design. The process consists of two steps:

- *Step 1*: Develop a persona—Gather demographic information on typical users and then create a persona's characteristics.
- *Step 2*: Develop a scenario of use—Use the persona's characteristics to write out a scenario that describes how that persona would interact with a particular design (e.g., use a given interface).

For this process, designers first use surveys, ethnographies, interviews, and other data collection methods to gather background information on typical users. Designers then use this data to create various personas—fictitious characters—that can provide insights on how certain users will interact with a design. The idea is that while a persona is a composite figure comprised of demographic and fictional biographic elements, every persona is considered a real, flesh-and-blood person for design purposes. In fact, many designers hang pictures of their favorite personas on their walls to remind them who they are designing for and what these people may need in a design. Such pictures might be computer generated, sketched, or stock images that represent how a particular kind of user might look.

How are personas used?

After describing the characteristics of their personas, technical communicators can develop scenarios in which a particular persona (type of user) might use a certain design (e.g., try to use a particular interface to log into a system). They create such scenarios to better understand their design from the perspective of a particular persona and the context in which that persona would likely use the related design. In other words, the persona creates a specific context of use associated with a particular persona/group of users. The use scenario thus provides the designer with insights on how that persona might use a given design. The resulting insights can uncover unexpected situations and create additional design ideas.

Various organizations use personas to tailor their content to specific kinds of users. Apple and Hubspot, for example, use personas to tailor to specific customers as audiences. Similarly, the British and the Dutch governments use personas to improve the online and onsite services they offer citizens. These organizations do this by analyzing how they can improve their marketing, online presence, and total customer experience through reviewing different kinds of data (demographics and visitor analytics) collected in different ways (through social media and questionnaires) (Lee, 2014). Such approaches allow them to develop personas for a more nuanced understanding of who an audience is and what that audience needs.

How can personas help us understand international users?

To understand how cultures approach mobile content, one must move beyond simple audience analysis or generalizations of behavior. Early Web design approaches focused on culture-specific elements like colors, symbols, or concepts as related to cultural expectations of static design. Today, however, technical communicators need to consider how online interaction often involves a range of technologies used to engage in real-time exchanges with individuals

located all over the globe. Moreover, designs now have to work on mobile, tablet, and desktop screen sizes and do so in a uniform manner on a global scale.

This situation creates new opportunities for developing personas that help address such global contexts. Technical communicators must now consider how an understanding of cross-cultural use is essential to mobile design decisions (St.Amant & Rice, 2015; Dutta & Das, 2015). To this end, Guiseppe Getto and Kirk St.Amant suggest developing personas for global communication contexts. These personas would address how cultural and technological factors influence individual acceptance of a design. Technical communicators could use these personas to address cultural, technological infrastructures and local use factors when creating designs for different nations and regions.

To address mobile designs in a changing global landscape, technical communicators need to ask key questions associated with how people use mobile designs and wireless technologies in a particular area. These questions should include:

- What existing technologies do people strongly associate with their local culture? (Culture)
- How do people identify themselves (e.g., as individual user or as part of a group)? How does this identification affect their willingness to embrace global changes? (Globalization)
- What technologies are available based on existing technological infrastructure? (Infrastructure)
- What local and cultural beliefs and values affect technology use? (Local Use)

Personas designed to address these questions locate the user in a specific context where factors of culture, globalization, infrastructure, and technology provide important insights on a particular context of use. This is because local use affects how a design is received.

Developing such personas for international users involves:

- Identifying how existing technologies (and their designs) are used in a culture.
- Understanding how much the members of a culture are open to change.
- Determining what infrastructures exist, their reliability, and their effects on technology use.
- Assessing what local beliefs and values create expectations for a design.

By addressing such factors when developing international personas, technical communicators can better determine how certain groups in different nations and regions perceive and use mobile designs in various contexts.

How can we implement personas?

The following scenario provides a step-by-step example of how technical communicators can apply personas when designing for users in international contexts. The steps include how to:

- Write and develop a persona;
- Write a use scenario to narrate how that persona interacts with that design given their characteristics; and
- Use input from that scenario in creating a more robust design.

The scenario described below uses the design of a mobile application (app) to be used in the particular international context in the Netherlands.

Step 1: Identify the Context of Use

Astrid needs to design a mobile device application that helps customers catch their bus in the small country of the Netherlands. She begins by considering a simple and straightforward design. After all, people who are catching the bus need to be able to do so very quickly and while on the go.

Astrid considers her mobile app needs to consist of three pieces of input:

1. Current location
2. End destination
3. Travel time (e.g., time when next available bus arrives at location)

To use the app, individuals enter their starting address and the address of their desired destination. Next, they use a drop-down menu to select a desired travel time (how long to get from start point to end point) and then click a "search" button. The app then provides the address of the closest bus station, the next available time of departure for the desired destination, and the anticipated time of arrival at that destination. Using this prototype of her interface design, Astrid now needs to create a persona in order to revise her prototype into a stronger design.

Step 2: Create a User Persona

In order to create her persona, Astrid collects demographic information about typical Netherlands-based users for her mobile application. After doing some research, she realizes the following:

- Mobile phone use is quite accepted and integrated into Dutch culture (according to World Bank data, there are 116 mobile phone subscriptions per 100 people).
- The average Dutch person identifies her- or himself as an individual first, then as part of a group.
- The Dutch are quick to accept new technologies into their lives and are quick to respond to global developments (e.g., using Whatsapp for neighborhood watch).
- Due to the country's small size, mobile phone infrastructure is quite strong.
- Free wireless coverage is widely available at home, work, and in public places (such as Dutch national railways) and is valued.

For her *persona*, Astrid develops a profile of a typical mobile device user in the Netherlands:

> Najib, 56 years old, is a Dutch-Moroccan man who is a casual user of mobile apps and has just moved to

a different city in the Netherlands. He does not feel confident with his mobile phone skills, but invests time in getting to know the features of his mobile device in order to learn. Also, he is not as familiar with his new surroundings, having just moved to a new apartment in the city of the Hague. He retains close ties with his family, who live in Amsterdam, by visiting them each weekend.

Step 3: Develop a Use Scenario

For her *use scenario*, Astrid writes out how Najib interacts with the app design based on Najib's specific needs, attitudes, values, context, and overall goals. Astrid writes out Najib's interaction based on these elements:

> Najib wants to visit his family in Amsterdam. Because he has moved to a new neighborhood in the Hague, Najib is unsure of where the nearest bus location is and, at times, has difficulties spelling out the exact address where he is located due to having just moved. The interface prompts him to write out his current location, his destination, and select the time. Najib's attitude is that he will learn this quickly after getting to know his new neighborhood in the Hague, but … he would like the app to help him if he does not know his immediate location. When he types in a location or destination, similarly named streets in different cities appear, and these take precious time and are somewhat confusing as these prompt a choice before searching. He needs to find his exact location on a map using his phone's global positioning system (GPS), and to locate the nearest bus station and destination. When in Amsterdam, he knows his way around and can more easily connect with local transit.

Step 4: Use the Persona and the Use Scenario to Gather Input on the Design

As a result of describing her persona and having Najib (a fictional character) interact with her initial prototype design, Astrid considers implementing the following changes in her interfaces:

- A map function accessible when the location field is selected for input, which can help users locate their current location more quickly without learning street names in new locations.
- Predictive text input, which helps reduce typing errors.
- Frequent searches and saving common routes, which can help people quickly find their most-traveled routes (such as Amsterdam).

In this way, personas help anticipate different international user expectations by looking at design contexts as problems of context—situations where information and design need to function in very specific, concrete settings.

Rather than address stereotypical ideas of what a global audience needs, personas can help technical communicators identify *where* an intended group of users is and what needs, attitudes, and values they have that affect perceptions of and uses of a given design. Such designs differ in that they may not tailor to specific cultural stereotypes as contexts. They are instead embedded in particular use scenarios—situations where technology, globalization, and infrastructure factor into how technologies are used in a particular context. As such, these personas can help technical communicators create content for mobile distribution in international settings.

Conclusion

Increasingly, technical communicators need to address international audiences who use mobile designs while on the go. Personas, in turn, can aid in making effective design choices for such contexts. By merging demographic data with the needs, attitudes, values, and goals of users, personas help technical communicators understand the contexts in which mobile content is used. Using such personas to guide design practices, technical communicators can develop more effective approaches to sharing mobile content in today's global contexts. i

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Technical Communication

Opportunities in China

By HAN YU and MELANIE G. FLANDERS | *Associate Fellow*

CHINA'S INCREASED DEMAND for English-based technical communication—in combination with the emergence and continuous growth of the Internet, smartphones, and social media—means China represents a range of opportunities for U.S. technical communicators to work in China or with Chinese businesses. To productively take advantage of such opportunities, however, technical communicators need to keep certain factors in mind. This article shares strategies and considerations that can help with this process. These approaches are based on one author's experience working as a technical communicator and consultant in China for the past 10 years and the other author's experience practicing and researching technical communication in both the United States and China.

China's Desire to Participate in International Standards

Today, the Chinese government is keen on increasing its foreign investment in other countries, especially nations in South America, Africa, the Middle East, the former Soviet Union, and along the ancient Silk Road. Given this trend and the de facto status of English as the international lingua franca, developing English-language user documentation has become a requirement for many Chinese businesses. Doing so involves addressing international standards.

In early 2015, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang signed, and China's State Council subsequently issued, "Guiding Opinions on Promoting International Production Capacity and Equipment Manufacturing Cooperation." The "Opinions" contain principles, objectives, tasks, policies, and measures for promoting international production capacity and cooperation in equipment manufacturing. In particular, China would like to see existing Chinese standards become recognized internationally and to participate in formulating international and regional standards through interactions with the International Organization for Standardization (ISO).

To achieve this objective, China must compile foreign-language versions (in English at a minimum) of its technical standards for high-speed railways, power, engineering machinery, chemical, nonferrous metals, building materials, and other industries as early as possible. These developments provide opportunities for U.S.-educated technical communicators to work as writers, editors, consultants, and trainers in China.

Growth of Digital Media and Mobile Devices

Besides international business, the growth of digital media opens up internal Chinese markets for technical communication, especially in the areas of interface design and usability studies. High-speed Internet and 4G infrastructure are now commonplace in China. Additionally, smartphones and social media have taken the country by storm. According to a recent study, two thirds of China's mobile connections happen on a smartphone, and China's smartphone users outnumber those in the United States, Brazil, and Indonesia combined (Perez, 2015). While a large share of this market is dominated by immensely popular brands like Apple devices, China's homegrown smartphone companies such as Huawei, Xiaomi, ZTE, Vivo, Oppo, Coolpad, and Meizu have also secured a strong foothold in the local marketplace.

A major cultural communication shift has happened as a result. The typical noisy chatter on buses and subways (where phone signals do exist!) has been replaced by passengers glued to their phones. Young and old alike now regularly browse the Web, check social media, watch TV and movies, and play games. The gaming business, in particular, is big in China, and many companies are attempting to create games that appeal to international markets. These developments provide opportunities for technical communicators to participate in mobile design, game scenario development, character descriptions, and product promotion.

With the spread of smartphones, social media and mobile applications have quickly followed. While the Great Firewall of China might block several recognized social media platforms, several Chinese-created products allow individuals to network and exchange ideas online. For example, WeChat, a social-networking service parallel to Facebook, allows users to chat privately or in groups and to share status updates, photos, and videos. The video-sharing platform YOUKU allows individuals to upload and view longer videos and is similar to YouTube, while various Weibo (microblogging) platforms provide Chinese users with Twitter-like experiences. Meanwhile, ebooks have become a popular medium in China, and there are also numerous applications that allow individuals to buy things

online, order food, pay bills, purchase theater tickets, and even call a taxi (a very useful app when it is raining!).

Although these applications are very convenient for Chinese users, little effort has been dedicated to developing interfaces that allow non-Chinese readers to employ such technologies. Yet there is potential both to translate and to culturally adapt these products for individuals in other countries. Doing so would provide a range of opportunities for technical communicators who have experience in translation, localization, and internationalization. It would also provide opportunities for technical communicators to work on integrating social media into product help as well as working with online user communities in a variety of ways.

Current Realities in Universities and Industry

To a large extent, technical communication as a profession and discipline (at least as it is practiced in the United States, Europe, and Japan) has a very short history in China. While this may be old news, what *is* noticeable is that a growing number of Chinese professionals have working titles such as "technical communicator," "technical communication trainer," "documentation specialist," or "information architect." These professionals, however, are often not trained as technical communicators per se, but as technical translators—a profession and discipline that *is* well developed in China.

In China, many technological and comprehensive universities offer Master's degrees in Translation and Interpreting (MTIs). These programs help students develop language skills and subject-matter knowledge that will enable them to do translation and interpretation work in multiple specialized industries. In these programs, native Chinese speakers are trained to translate materials between Chinese and English as well as between Chinese and a growing list of other languages. Interestingly, these programs typically are not part of a technical communication or engineering department. Rather, they are found in the foreign languages department of a university. In fact, the only Chinese technical communication program the authors know of (offered by the School of Software & Microelectronics, Beijing University) is fewer than 10 years old. These factors have important implications for how technical communication is practiced in China today.

In the workplace, language and communication specialists are not the ones authoring user documentation. Rather, engineers and other subject matter experts produce such materials. This situation can be the case in the United States, but there are also important differences and complications. If you have ever complained that technical communicators and subject matter experts "do not speak the same language," know that this situation is literally the case in China. There, the vast majority of engineers and subject matter experts do not compose or communicate in English, but instead draft initial texts in Chinese. Translators are then charged with converting these Chinese-language source materials into English-language target materials.

This process is further complicated by the different styles of communication Chinese and English-speaking cultures have (e.g., uses of direct vs. indirect references). Moreover, the Chinese engineer assigned to document a project is often a junior or an apprentice engineer unfamiliar with all aspects and functionality of the product or project. Because the documentation is not viewed as an integral part of the project (sound familiar?), trying to collaborate with Chinese subject matter experts early on in project development is difficult, or impossible. And because the engineers, rather than the translation department, typically "own" the documentation, translators or technical editors might have a difficult time following best communication practices if the engineers do not agree with certain documentation approaches.

This is not to say that this situation is always the case. In fact, some Chinese companies do employ individuals with backgrounds in communication and translation to function as technical writers. The transition to this approach, however, is slow because it means allowing people who are not directly involved in creating a product (e.g., engineers) to write about it.

Suggestions for Working Effectively with Chinese Colleagues

The economic growth and current realities in China are creating opportunities for U.S. technical communicators to work as editors, writers, consultants, and trainers there. This situation, however, does not mean that Chinese companies and colleagues will simply open their arms to professional technical communicators from abroad.

Although U.S.-style technical communication programs are rare in China, some Chinese colleagues might have had some technical communication education in the United States or Europe, or they might have participated in training opportunities that are emerging in China. Moreover, the Chinese communication and documentation specialists one encounters in China will likely have a focused educational background in translating and interpreting technical, scientific, and medical information. Given this background, it is advisable that non-Chinese technical communicators consider the following factors when working with Chinese colleagues:

- Respect your Chinese colleagues' experience and background and shed the sentiment that they are not "technical communicators" or "native speakers of English." Genuine respect and a desire to learn will go a long way in any type of collaboration and consultation.
- Develop good editing skills as this is a key requirement for gaining the respect of your Chinese colleagues. One of the authors once witnessed that U.S.-based technical writers lose credibility with a Chinese company because Chinese counterparts spotted language issues in the U.S. counterparts' work.

Also know that your Chinese colleagues will likely view you as a resource, appreciate your expertise and experience, and be eager to pick your brain. You can thus be a resource by imparting knowledge positively through different everyday work and communication patterns.

- Avoid non-constructive comments, such as "What does this mean?" or "What's this?" when reviewing Chinese colleagues' work. Instead, attempt to decipher the meaning and ask more pointed questions, such as "Is the intended meaning [this] or [that]?" Similarly, instead of saying "too vague," explain why something is vague or let the Chinese counterpart know what information might be missing (e.g., "Can you add some text that explains….").
- Remember that some "issues" you see in your Chinese colleagues' writing may have resulted from experience with different versions of English. Chinese elementary, middle, and high schools often teach British English, while colleges and universities more often teach American English—often without explaining dialect differences to students.
- Learn to spot, decipher, and correct Chinese-English, or "Chinglish," which contains nonstandard expressions that directly and (often) crudely translate Chinese words into English without consideration of syntax or context. So, if you see an "odd" expression, use it as a learning opportunity and ask your Chinese colleagues what it means. It may be a result of Chinglish, and the colleague will likely appreciate knowing the proper expression.
- Volunteer to be an informal trainer. If you are working with a group of translators or technical writers and you see patterns of communication that need to be altered, offer to provide periodic, interactive training sessions (with lots of examples) to address these issues. Training sessions can address technical writing best practices as well as grammar issues.
- Be prepared to explain why something needs to be done a certain way whenever you offer suggestions.

When Your Chinese Colleagues Disagree….

Because your Chinese colleagues likely have more training in translation and interpretation than in technical communication, they might disagree with some practices you take for granted. For example, they might not be able to or find it useful to consult with subject matter experts to gain clarification on an item. It is actually easy to see why this is the case once you have walked in their shoes.

A case in point: One of the authors once worked at a Chinese company where she was asked to "Americanize" (localize) documentation that had been translated from Chinese to English. After the work was finished, the documents were returned to the product developers for approval. In this instance, if the English deviated too much from the source Chinese, the developers, many of whom could read English well, would reject the translation. In situations like this one, patience and an ability to explain your work are central to getting colleagues to see things differently.

In this case, the author had to explain to the translators why certain changes were made; for example, why certain information needed to be presented as a procedure rather than in paragraph form, why some information was irrelevant to the target audience, why the target audience needed certain information that was not present, and the use of particular prepositions (e.g., is it *in* the screen or *on* the screen). The translators would then pass these explanations on to the developers. In many cases, the developers eventually agreed to the change. The justification and rationale for changes, however, had to have sound reasoning behind them for such agreement to happen. In sum, it was not enough to say "do it this way because that's how we do it in English."

Final Thoughts

China offers an exciting and promising, if still currently limited, market for technical communicators. Much of the training and best practices one gains in U.S. or European technical communication programs or workplaces will transfer and prepare the individual for occasional projects or even a long-term career in China. At the same time, certain seemingly common practices often taken for granted will not prevail in China—at least not now. While considerations of language and communication remain essential, so is the understanding of the people, their culture, their backgrounds, their working contexts, their relationships, and their constraints.

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Training Technical Communication

Students to Work with Translators

By YVONNE CLEARY | *Senior Member* and DARINA M. SLATTERY

Introduction to Technical Communication and Translation

Much of the content produced by technical communicators and content developers will later be translated for users from other cultures. For example, instruction manuals, websites, e-learning courses, and software tools and their components (e.g., messages, menus, and dialog boxes) frequently need to be available in many languages and for many locales. Good translation, however, is only possible when the source text (the text to be translated) is written clearly and with translation in mind.

In this context, technical communicators have an important role to play as facilitators of translation. Their attention to linguistic features and stylistic conventions can help or hinder translators in fully understanding and effectively translating a text. Likewise, when technical communicators clearly understand internationalization and localization issues, they can address the requirements of selecting audio, visuals, and other multimedia elements that are suitable for audiences in other locales. As such, they can make decisions that can help or hinder the translation and localization processes. For these reasons, it is important to teach technical communication students about various aspects of translation—and provide them with opportunities to apply such ideas—during their educational careers.

Educational Approaches

Because good technical communication facilitates good translation, it is important to train technical communication students to work with translators. To this end, the MA in Technical Communication and E-Learning at the University of Limerick includes content on writing and designing for translation and localization throughout the curriculum. Students learn about writing characteristics that can cause problems for translators. They also learn about the effects of culture on users' perceptions of design and about how formatting and technical conventions can differ from nation to nation and culture to culture.

By examining such issues through different courses, students gain an effective theoretical understanding of the potential difficulties of writing and designing for translation and localization. Yet to help students fully understand how such factors work, it is essential to provide them with opportunities to apply what they have learned. Doing so often requires access to counterparts in other cultures—individuals who can serve in the role of the translators and localizers students will work with upon completing their studies.

One way to achieve this experience is through international projects where students use online media to engage in different translation and localization activities. At the University of Limerick, such experiences take place through a virtual team documentation translation project involving international partners. In particular, students in Ireland collaborate with partners (students) in the United States and France to work on true international content creation and translation projects. Through this collaborative approach, students in multiple nations gain firsthand experience of how to work with colleagues in international contexts.

The Virtual Team Documentation Translation Project

The project undertaken by University of Limerick students involves an annual collaboration between faculty and students at three universities: the University of Limerick (UL) in Ireland, the University of Central Florida (UCF) in the United States, and the Université Paris-Diderot in France. For this project, the process begins with Irish and American students collaboratively writing documentation in English. The resulting text is then delivered to participating French students who are responsible for translating those English-language texts into French.

Planning for this project first began in 2005 when faculty from UL and UCF met at the 2005 ProComm conference (then called the International Professional Communication Conference) held at UL. Through a series of discussions, the faculty explored the possibilities of joint projects for their students. To foster collaboration around such projects, UL and UCF faculty ran several virtual team projects between 2006 and 2012, and these undertakings involved Irish and American students using online media to collaborate on different activities. In 2012, a French faculty member became involved with these projects, and

the nature of the international collaboration expanded to include a translation component.

Today, this international project involves grouping Irish, American, and French students into teams of six to seven individuals who use online media to collaboratively write and translate technical documents. Each team consists of writers (the Irish and the American students) and translators (the French students). The members of these teams collaborate to produce both a well-written English-language source document and an equivalent French translation. The quality of the original source texts and the resulting translations is assessed by the instructors in the United States, Ireland, and France.

How Virtual Team Projects Are Coordinated

The virtual team project is overseen by four instructors: two in Ireland, one in France, and one in the United States. The instructors plan every aspect of the project, from placing students in teams, to offering guidance and instruction on virtual teamwork, to grading the final submissions. For students, this project involves multiple phases.

In the first phase, the writers (the Irish and American students) have to communicate with their French teammates to select a topic for which they must both write and translate related instructions. Typically, the topic involves a particular technology or technology-enabled process (e.g., how to create a Google document for collaboration or how to videoconference using Skype). Every student on the team is required to engage in the discussions about prospective topics and then select a final topic for the overall project.

As they prepare the English-language instructions, the Irish and American students must ensure the English text adheres to Plain English guidelines and is suitable for translation (see the Plain English Campaign for information on writing for Plain English, *www.plainenglish.co.uk/*). Next, the writers choose suitable graphics to accompany their written instructions. In so doing, they need to consider localization issues and thus seek the advice of their French teammates on how to select effective visuals. Once completed, the final English-language document is sent to French team members for translation and localization.

During the translation/localization stage, the students working as translators regularly query their Irish and American teammates to seek clarification on certain terms and phrases used in the source text. The French translators also seek clarification on the meaning of different parts of the source text in order to ensure effective understanding of the materials being translated.

Through such collaborations and interactions, students learn about effective international communication and project management while also learning about translation. In this way, projects like this one expose students to the challenges associated with selecting suitable tools for creating materials. These projects also provide students with experiences associated with writing translatable and localizable documentation, managing geographically diverse team members, and communicating with culturally diverse teammates.

Preparing Students for Careers in Technical Communication

The experience of working with French translators provides the Irish and American writers with practical experience of how their writing decisions affect comprehension and, ultimately, a translator's ability to accurately convey a writer's intentions and objectives. Moreover, involvement in this project helps prepare students to work in industry, as most of today's technical communication jobs require some form of virtual collaboration—if not some aspect of working with translation and localization. Through their participation, the students learn about the challenges and rewards of collaborating with people from other nations, across time zones, and using technologies to facilitate interactions. They also develop the skill sets employers see as valuable when working in the modern global business context.

The advantages of such projects are not lost on students preparing for the job market. As one student (a participant in the project in Spring 2014) noted in a blog post about the project: "It has made me realise that a virtual team is very effective as [it] gives availability (sic) to ideas and minds outside of your own geographical area. However, if an individual did not partake fully then the team could easily suffer. Thankfully, we did not see any negative sides on our virtual project and we had a very successful outcome and experience." Feedback from graduates further illustrates that such experiences are central to helping them secure employment because they are able to discuss their experiences in job interviews. Many students also report they have a better idea of what to expect from virtual teams when they begin working—a factor that can give them an edge during and after the job search.

Prospective Connections for Industry and Educators

A recent paper by the authors (see Cleary et al., 2015) outlines a process technical communicators in education can use to partner with educators on similar kinds of projects. To foster such collaborations, we recommend interested individuals first conduct research on overseas universities and programs that include components on which their employees (if in industry) or technical communication students (if in education) might collaborate (e.g., a writing or translation component). Once a suitable program is identified, the faculty member can contact a counterpart at the other institution and ask to discuss potential collaborations. In such conversations, participants may need to consider and discuss questions such as:

- Do both universities have enough overlap in their semesters for students to be able to work together on a project?
- In which semester should the project run?

- In which course could a virtual team project be included?
- What learning outcomes should the project achieve? If possible, it is helpful to share course outlines, or even to invite faculty members to view one another's courses through virtual learning environments (VLEs).

We recommend interested individuals start to collaborate with potential partners in other universities at least a year before running a virtual team project involving trainees, employees, or students. That time period provides all involved parties a chance to better understand the scope of such projects and to agree on the project they will require participants (employees or students) to undertake. Once these factors are confirmed, participants can work out the more specific details (e.g., dates and deliverables) of the project.

This extended time for interaction also enables faculty to get to know one another better and to engage in socioemotional communication essential to building trust. Such trust is often essential to effective outcomes for the participants (both the faculty and the learners) involved in such virtual team projects (see Flammia et al., 2010). If possible, the faculty coordinating such projects should try to meet face-to-face (e.g., at a conference) to discuss activities in more detail and to get to know one another better. If meeting face-to-face is not possible, a videoconference (e.g., via a tool like Skype) can be a good alternative to getting to know one's collaborators better.

In terms of fostering industry-academy partnerships around such projects, the authors invite technical communicators and content developers in industry to the UL campus each year. The purpose of these visits is for individuals to share their experiences involving content creation, translation, and localization with students. In so doing, these visitors also provide insights on virtual teamwork.

In some cases, local industry has served as a client—or as a source of the various projects undertaken by students for these international activities. Occasionally, our virtual team assignments have, for example, involved client-based projects (see Slattery et al., 2008). To this end, we welcome suggestions from technical communication practitioners about service learning projects that the student writers and translators could work on in such educational contexts. Additionally, the authors regularly invite practitioners to contribute to—and encourage *Intercom* readers to participate in—such projects by providing sample content for technical communication and translation students to work on.

Conclusions

Technical communication students need to develop many skills, including skills in writing for international audiences and writing for translation and localization. Students also need to learn how to collaborate on projects with geographically dispersed team members. This situation motivated faculty members at the University of Limerick, University of Central Florida, and Université Paris-Diderot to collaborate on annual documentation and translation projects between Irish, American, and French students.

These projects emphasize the importance of writing in Plain English, writing culturally sensitive documentation, and selecting appropriate graphics. They also introduce students to common challenges associated with working in virtual teams and include aspects relating to technology use, culture, communication, and management. By expanding such collaborative projects to include a wider range of industry and academic participants, individuals in different segments of the field can work together to better prepare students for today's globalized workplace.

YVONNE CLEARY, PHD, *(*yvonne.cleary@ul.ie*) is Program Director for the MA in technical communication and e-learning. Her teaching and research interests include technical communication in Ireland, technical communication pedagogy, and virtual teams. Her work has been published in* Technical Communication*, the* Journal of Technical Writing and Communication*, and* IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication*, and she has presented her research at conferences in Europe and the United States.*

DARINA M. SLATTERY, PHD, *(*darina.slattery@ul.ie*) has a background in computing, languages, and business. Her teaching and research interests include: inter alia, e-learning, instructional design, and virtual teamwork. Her research has been published in international journals such as the* IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication *and the* Journal of Technical Writing and Communication*, and in* IEEE ProComm Conference Proceedings*, amongst others. She is currently the head of technical communication and instructional design at the University of Limerick. Darina can be contacted via LinkedIn at* www.linkedin.com/in/darinamslattery.

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Interview with David Beebe, STC Summit Closing Keynote

BY NICKY BLEIEL | *Associate Fellow*

DAVID BEEBE is the VP of Global Creative and Content Marketing for Marriott International and his Summit Keynote is titled "Publish or Perish—How to Win the Hearts, Minds, and Wallets of Next-Generation Consumers with Content Marketing." You can learn more about David and his talk here: *http://summit.stc.org/closing-keynote-david-beebe/*

Nicky Bleiel: David Beebe is the VP of Global Creative and Content Marketing for Marriott International. He's an innovator who wins hearts and minds—as well as wallets—with content.

He spent 15 years in the entertainment industry at Disney, ABC, PBS, Showtime, and DirecTV, is a frequent conference speaker, and has been featured in the *Wall Street Journal*, *Washington Post*, *New York Times* and more.

On top of all of that, he's the closing keynote at the Society for Technical Communication Summit in Anaheim this May 15th through the 18th. Welcome, David.

David Beebe: Hi, welcome. Good to be here.

Nicky: Thanks. You may be the first STC keynote who's ever been featured in *Variety* magazine and won two Emmy awards. Is there anything else you would like summit attendees to know about you?

David: I think the message there is obviously a lot of stuff is changing around how people communicate all different types of content. For me what I'm doing now, it's about marrying those two worlds, coming from a storytelling background and a communicator background into the marketing space, which is the changing media landscape.

It's really combining those two things, and as you mentioned, to really provide value first to consumers and to entertain them and inform them, and ultimately win loyalty with our brands.

Nicky: That all ties into your presentation, which is titled "Publish or Perish—How to Win the Hearts, Minds, and Wallets of Next-Generation Consumers with Content Marketing." I don't want you to give too much away, but we'd like to give everyone a little preview of your talk. You believe that advertising is shifting away from traditional methods and towards content marketing. What do you think is causing this shift?

David: I think the first thing is, technology has enabled all of us to really communicate in different ways and for brands to communicate directly with consumers.

We've cut down a lot of the middle men, I would say, which would be your traditional publishers or television networks, or whatever is out there that you were previously having to buy and rent the audience from, to reach an audience and tell them and mass-market to—really, one-to-one personalized communication.

Technology's been that big driver that's enabled consumers to also become content creators themselves. It's good for us, but also the challenge there for anyone now, whether you're a brand or individual or whatever you're communicating, is there's so much content out there.

To really break through and engage with the audience you're trying to build there, it comes down to what I talked about before. How do we provide value to the viewer, to the reader, whatever that is? As brands, that's often entertaining them, informing them, helping to travel better, and for us being part of that entire travel journey.

I think all communicators out there, we're finding new ways to engage audiences and build community around there and then ultimately drive commerce.

Nicky: That makes a good point. You talked about a lot of different kinds of content. How do you think technical content fits into a content marketing strategy?

David: I think it's certainly one part of it. Again, with technology in the past, I think there was just a couple forms of content, typically editorial-driven or paper, print. What technology's allowed us to do is to create all types of different content now, whether it's things as GIFs, whether it's infographics, whether it's video. All these new interesting ways, and then all these new platforms have come along, too.

It's really important, I think, that you don't develop a piece of content and publish everywhere. You really have to create content for each platform for the consumer behavior on that platform, and how people consume content on it.

I think from a technical perspective, one of the opportunities is one, so many more platforms. Also,

so many new ways to engage people, to inform them, whatever it may be around, but in new ways of content formats as well.

Multiple ways in now, and then ultimately, again, how are you providing that value and how are you communicating on all those different platforms? It's not just one platform anymore.

Nicky: Oh, absolutely, and I read that at Marriott you use what you call the 3 C's strategy. The three Cs stand for content, community, and commerce. Obviously you're publishing, distributing, and sharing content against multiple platforms and devices. Can you tell me a little bit about how you're making that happen?

David: Yeah, absolutely. Our 3 C strategy, which I think really applies to a brand, a person, in a sense, or any communicator out there, that first C is that content. How are you scaling content of different types across multiple channels?

As you scale content, you ultimately build a community around that. A community can mean many, many different things to many people. But ideally, if it's a YouTube, how are you building more subscribers?

Perhaps if you're a business that's got a loyalty component to it, a loyalty club membership, driving loyalty and getting more signups there, or just building more customers, in a sense. You're building a community of people around your content.

The commerce piece is the last C. I think for us, commerce means a couple of things. One is obviously putting heads in beds, so selling hotel rooms. From a media perspective, because of the way we produce our content, that content becomes valuable to other people. Actually what a television network studio would do is you license your content to other distributors who need content as well.

Commerce for some companies could just be as simple as, again, building that loyalty or brand perception, or just having a good experience with your content—which ultimately drives, again, more loyalty to your brand, your product, and will ultimately drive commerce.

Nicky: Thanks. One of the other things you're going to talk about in the keynote is the intersection of technology and storytelling. Do you think technical communicators are or can be storytellers?

David: Yeah, I think so. I think we're all storytellers. We're all media companies in a way now, in a big part or a part thanks to technology. When you think about us at a very micro level, we all as individuals are on social networks, and we're creating content every day.

We're publishing things on Facebook, on Twitter, on LinkedIn and Instagram, or whatever platform or platforms you're on as an individual. That, at the smallest form, is acting as a storyteller, as a content creator—as a publisher, really.

You're actively choosing, whether you realize it or not, what content you're going to post on which platform. You might put some things on Facebook, and you might not put some things on LinkedIn and vice versa. You're choosing what to put where, based on what audiences you have there.

That's what we're doing at a much larger level as a brand, acting as a traditional media company and publisher and really a storyteller. I think anyone that's creating any form of content today, the way to engage with them is through that traditional storytelling format.

I think there's interesting ways you could do that in a technical space that goes beyond a lot of the traditional ways. I think that's where you can start to introduce new formats that, in a way, become very interactive and ultimately are informing them but also can become very entertaining to the folks, your audience that's engaging with it.

As I said, it doesn't matter what we do. We're all in the people business, and we're all storytellers in one way or another.

Nicky: Cool. I think the audience at the Summit is really going to find your talk interesting and useful. I think you're going to enjoy meeting all of us also, I hope. I'd like to thank you for joining me, David, and I look forward to meeting you and attending your talk at the STC Summit in Anaheim this May.

David: Absolutely, thanks for having me today. I look forward to seeing you guys there.

To learn more about David Beebe, see the following sources:

- Executive profile in Variety: *http://variety.com/exec/david-beebe/*
- Marriott's Influencer Marketing Program Breaks the Mold: A Look at Their Strategy *http://content-marketinginstitute.com/2015/08/marriott-influencer-marketing/* (David was a finalist for Content Marketer of the Year.)
- Meet David Beebe: *https://www.themuse.com/companies/marriottinternational/people/david-beebe-1*

Summit Sponsors and Exhibitors

Who's in Anaheim? See below for a preliminary list of sponsors and exhibitors attending the 2016 Technical Communication Summit. ** Indicates a sponsor.*

Company	Booth	Website
36Software	216	*www.36software.com*
Adobe*	122	*www.adobe.com*
Antidot - Fluid Topics*	210	*www.fluidtopics.com*
Association of Independent Information Professionals	106	*www.aiip.org*
CA Technologies	111	*www.ca.com*
Corporate Software Services	111	*www.cssdelivers.com*
easyDITA	108	*easydita.com*
eGloo Technologies Pty Limited*	202	*www.eglootech.com*
Group Wellesley, Inc.*	226	*www.groupwellesley.com*
Idea Translations	214	*www.ideatranslations.com*
IXIASOFT	307	*www.ixiasoft.com*
JustSystems Corp.	208	*www.xmetal.com*
Kinetic TheTechnologyAgency*	207	*www.KineticTMS.com*
Linguanational Translations, Inc.	125	*www.linguanational.com*
Linguava Interpreters	117	*www.linguava.com*
MadCap Software, Inc.*	116	*www.madcapsoftware.com*
Mercer University, Department of Technical Communication	115	*www.mercer.edu*
Pearson Education	301	*www.pearsonhighered.com*

Company	Booth	Website
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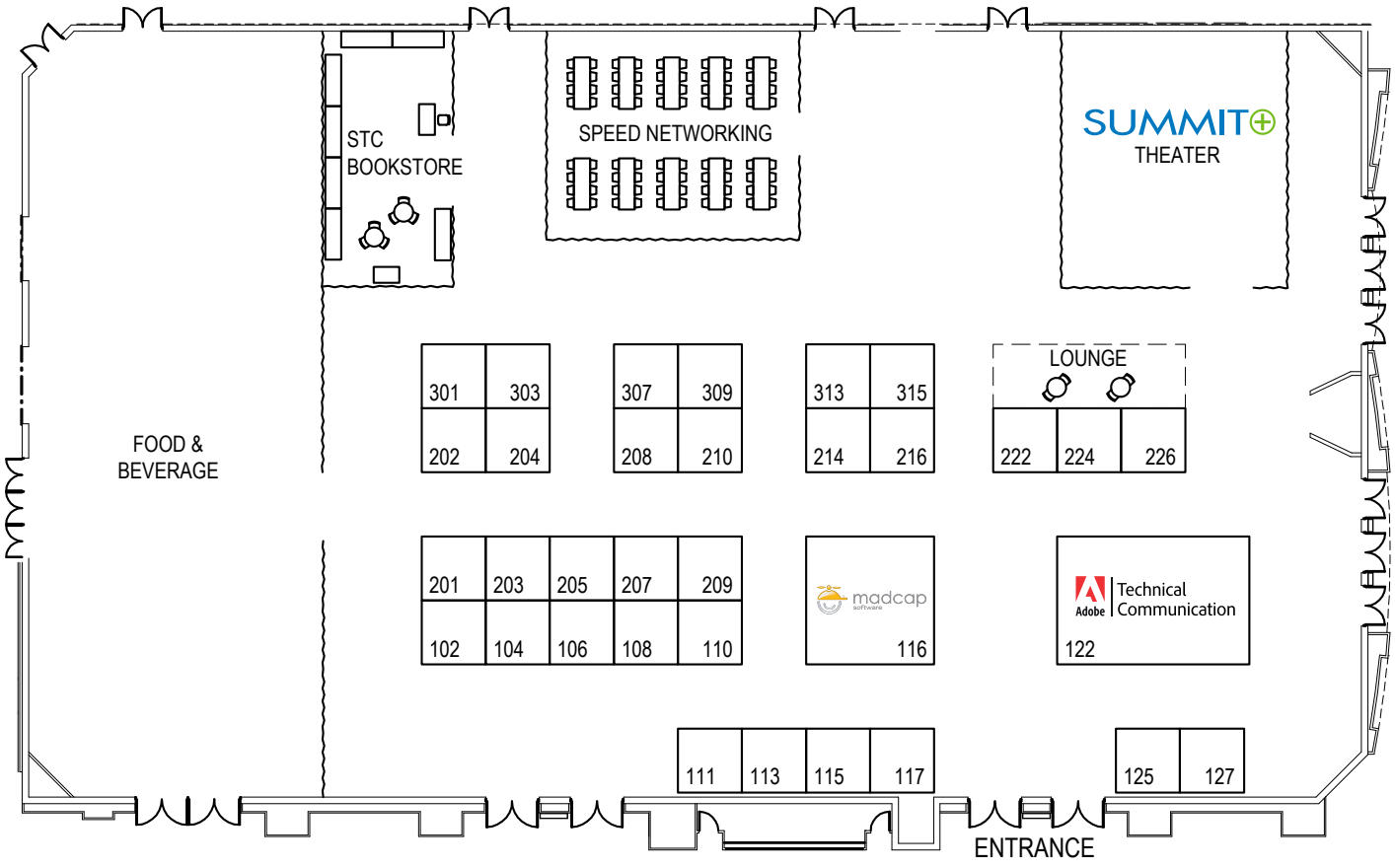

STC Awards and Honors

EACH YEAR, *Intercom* highlights all individual and community awards and honors in the Society Pages. The members, chapters, and SIGS listed on these pages are the best and brightest our Society has to offer. They are at the forefront of promotion our great profession, and we congratulate all of them on their success.

Please watch the STC website in the coming months for announcements on next year's awards and honors and how you can nominate yourself or a deserving colleague in 2017.

Introducing the New STC Fellows and Associate Fellows

STC IS PLEASED to announce that 14 distinguished members have been named Fellows and Associate Fellows of the Society. They will be recognized at the 2016 STC Summit in Anaheim, CA.

STC awards the rank of Associate Fellow to Senior Members who have attained distinction in the field of technical communication.

The rank of STC Fellow is conferred upon Associate Fellows who have attained such eminence in the field of technical communication that the Board deems them worthy of being singled out as one of the select few who have distinguished the Society and the profession.

Congratulations to all the honorees, listed below with the preliminary citation. And thank you to both the Fellows Committee (Chair Larry Kunz, Phylise Banner, John Hedtke, Brenda Huettner) and the Associate Fellows Committee (Chair Brian Lindgren, Lisa Cook, Bill Leavitt, Deanne Levander, Mike Markley, De Murr, Thea Teich, Carolyn Watt).

Fellows

Mollye Barrett
For thought leadership in content strategy and management, for advancing the profession by generously sharing her knowledge, and for long, dedicated service to the STC Wisconsin Chapter.

Pam Estes Brewer
For her extensive work with the Academic SIG, for her detailed scholarship, and for building bridges between academia and practitioners.

Russel Keith Hirst
For continuing devotion to his students and STC, for inspiring and mentoring students and colleagues for decades, and for his sustained, tireless dedication to the field.

Rachel Houghton
For tireless devotion to STC at many levels, for her willingness to share her knowledge and take on myriad responsibilities, and for relentlessly promoting and supporting our profession in both print and visual media.

Carolyn Kelley Klinger
For her boundless enthusiasm, her advocacy for STC as the voice of the profession, and her unwavering devotion to recruiting, training, and supporting STC volunteers.

Mike Murray
For mentoring, encouraging, and guiding technical communicators in Central Florida; for being instrumental to the success of the Accessibility SIG; and for dedicated leadership at the Society level.

Makarand Pandit
For skill and unflagging energy as he embodied the rise of technical communication in India; for guiding and inspiring a generation of technical communicators.

Marta A. Rauch
For enthusiastically bringing her vast knowledge of new technologies to our Society and to the profession, and for consistently encouraging others with kindness, wisdom, and joy.

Associate Fellows

Valerie M. Ball
For evoking in others the same passion she brings to the creation and delivery of all communication to maximize impact and comprehension of the intended audience.

Nicoletta A. Bleiel
For sustained and prolific contributions to the profession of technical communication and its practitioners through talks, articles, videos, blog posts, and web seminars, and for exemplary service as a Society leader.

Todd A. DeLuca
For inspirational and enthusiastic leadership within STC at the community and Society levels, for promoting the profession to future technical communicators, and for sharing his knowledge, including the value of volunteerism and community service.

Timothy Esposito
For dedicated leadership in the Philadelphia Metro Chapter, guidance to new technical communicators, and instruction to the Society leaders.

Kim E. Lindsey
For her insightful work in technical communication; for sustained creativity, enthusiasm, and innovation in promoting our profession; and for support the mission of STC and the Northeast Ohio Chapter.

Robert E. Perry
For demonstrated leadership and sharing of technical and professional knowledge, for inspiring many productive technical communication careers, and for significant contributions to the Society.

Community Achievement Awards

THE COMMUNITY ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS (CAAs) recognize STC chapters and special interest groups (SIGs) for exceptional accomplishments in meeting Society goals. The awards not only acknowledge that the obligations of a properly functioning community have been met, but that the winning communities have performed well beyond expectations.

The awards program recognizes, in a visible and meaningful manner, communities that demonstrate outstanding, innovative, and sustained performance in advancing the goals of the Society. STC recognizes the following communities for their efforts. Thank you to the committee, Chair MaryKay Grueneberg, Steve Adler, Francis Bao, Maryann Bowen, and Jamye Sagan.

Platinum Communities

Carolina Chapter
For your endless promotion of the Society, strong educational programs for technical communication professionals, as well as creative outreach to university students and other STC communities.

Chicago Chapter
For your dedication to the profession and to STC by offering a wide variety of innovative programs (featuring an elaborate 60th anniversary celebration), running a successful annual competition, producing excellent newsletters, and fostering strong partnerships with other organizations.

Philadelphia Metro Chapter
For having strong and varied programs and events for your members, and especially for your great focus on your student community with your Week of Writing and Web Content Strategy workshop.

Rochester Chapter
For your remarkable work in recognizing members through your various chapter-level awards, impressive blend of educational and social activities, and your extensive student outreach.

Gold Communities

Instructional Design & Learning SIG
Technical Editing SIG

Silver Communities

Houston Chapter
Northeast Ohio Chapter
Texas Tech University Student Chapter

Bronze Communities

San Diego Chapter
Southeastern Michigan Chapter

Jay R. Gould Award

THE JAY R. GOULD Award for Excellence in Teaching Technical Communication honors the distinguished teaching career of the late Professor Gould, whose academic mentorship guided many into the technical communication profession. To be eligible for the award, a nominee must have been a member of the Society for Technical Communication for at least ten years and must have been involved in postsecondary education for at least fifteen years. The committee this year includes Chair Kirk St.Amant, Jackie Damrau, Ann Jennings, and Russel Hirst.

This year's winners are:

Steven M. Gerson
For a career dedicated to student success through inspirational teaching and exceptional mentoring.

Herb J. Smith
For a career dedicated to effective education that has influenced teaching practices across the field.

Congratulations to Dr. Gerson and Dr. Smith for these honors.

Frank R. Smith Award

EACH YEAR, THE EDITOR of *Technical Communication* appoints a judging committee to select the outstanding article from the previous year's issues. Judges base their decisions on article content and form. The award honors the memory of Frank R. Smith, during whose 18-year tenure as editor *Technical Communication* became established as the flagship publication of STC and the profession. This year's judging team for the Frank R. Smith competition consisted of Chair Leah Guren, Ramesh Aiyyanger, and Sally Henschel.

The judges are pleased to announce that the Frank R. Smith Outstanding Article Award goes to Petra ten Hove and Hans van der Meij for their article, "Like It or Not: What Characterizes YouTube's More Popular Instructional Videos?" in the February 2015 issue of *Technical Communication*.

Petra ten Hove and **Hans van der Meij**
For the authors' thorough statistical analysis of quantifiable characteristics present in popular YouTube instructional videos, and for the clear and useful presentation of the results. Their methodology has immediate applications in technical communication while providing a solid foundation for future research.

Congratulations to the honorees.

Intercom Outstanding Article and Guest-Edited Issue Awards

STC GIVES OUT two awards for exemplary work published in *Intercom*: the best article of the year and the best guest-edited issue of the year. This year's judging team for the awards consisted of Chair Liz Herman, Beth Agnew, Nicky Bleiel, Barrie Byron, and Alan Houser.

The judges are pleased to announce that this year, there are two winners of the *Intercom* Outstanding Article Award: Kirk St.Amant for his article, "Re-considering Social Media for Global Contexts," in the April 2015 issue of *Intercom*; and Saul Carliner for his article, "Technical Communication at a Crossroads," in the Nov/Dec 2015 issue of *Intercom*.

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Kirk St.Amant
For posing important questions for technical communicators using social media with global audiences. The article is an outstanding example of using international technical communication principles in a modern media context.

Saul Carliner
For providing a historical perspective on the field and identifying challenges the technical communication profession faces after four epochs. The article provides a thorough overview of the past and a clear direction to strive for in the future.

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The *Intercom* Outstanding Guest Edited Issue goes to Marcia Riefer Johnston for her guest-edited January 2015 issue, with a theme of "professional writing and editing fundamentals."

Marcia Riefer Johnston
For guest editing an exemplary issue of *Intercom* that provides readers with an essential primer on fundamental writing and editing skills. The issue provides new insights and ongoing conversation on a core topic within technical communication.

Congratulations to all the honorees.

Ken Rainey Award

THE KEN RAINEY AWARD for Excellence in Research was established by STC in 2006 to celebrate and honor Professor Ken Rainey's passion for research that results in improvements to technical communication, especially to practice. The goal of the award is to encourage quality and excellence in technical communication research by honoring those whose research studies have made an outstanding contribution to the field. The committee for this year's award is Chair Ann Blakeslee, Michael Albers, Saul Carliner, Nancy W. Coppola, and Laurie Kantner.

This year's winner is:

Charles Kostelnick

For a lifetime of quality and influential research in the field of visual communication, a superior publication record, a well-deserved national and international reputation in the field, and influence on generations of teachers, scholars, and practitioners.

Congratulations to Dr. Kostelnick for this well-deserved honor.

Distinguished Service Awards

STC HAS LONG RECOGNIZED the importance of the hard work and commitment of its community members. Without their energy and enthusiasm, the Society would cease to be the largest, most effective, and most prestigious organization of technical communicators in the world.

Below are the honorees this year for the Distinguished Chapter Service Awards, Distinguished SIG Service Awards, and Distinguished Service Award for Students. Congratulations to each of them and thank you for your service to the Society. And thank you to the members of the committee, Chair Adam Evans, Roger Renteria, and Cheryl Landes.

Distinguished SIG Service Award

In 2002, the Society initiated a formal awards program to recognize the commitment and hard work of members of its special interest groups (SIGs). The Distinguished SIG Service Award (DSSA) recognizes length of SIG membership, consistency of service over the duration of membership, and variety of service.

Following are the winners of the 2016 Distinguished SIG Service Award and their official citations.

Europe SIG

Jennifer O Neill

For your leadership in the Europe SIG, your contributions to STC's Body of Knowledge in international communication, and your support of members in the field.

Academic SIG

Pam Brewer

In recognition of your exceptional, visionary leadership of and significant contributions to the Academic SIG, a Community of Excellence, and to the Society; and for your unwavering dedication to building bridges of communication between industry and education.

Technical Editing SIG

Wendy Mastandrea

For your enthusiastic service to the Technical Editing SIG throughout your membership, and for your outstanding contributions to the Technical Editing SIG's Water Cooler Chat program.

Technical Editing SIG

Lori Meyer

In recognition of your exemplary leadership, contributions, and service to the Technical Editing SIG and your commitment to excellence.

IDL SIG

Viqui Dill

For her superpowers, used in our SIG to lead both Programs and Website teams, that she expresses with grace and good humor.

CPTC Foundation Certification Study Guide Released

HAVE YOU BEEN CONSIDERING CPTC Foundation certification but could use more guidance on the process and what to expect? You need STC's new *CPTC Study Guide*. If you're self-studying for the exam, this document provides essential guidance on the syllabus and topics covered within the textbook, the structure of the exam, the question types, and information on continuing education. **STC members save $245 when registering for the exam**!

Earning the CPTC certification sets you apart from the competition and prepares you for new opportunities. Having met strict criteria established by STC, you can use your CPTC credential to:

- Prove you have mastered core tech comm knowledge and principles
- Show your dedication to staying current in the field
- Demonstrate your high professional standard
- Earn a new job, promotion, or raise

Learn more about the Foundation certification and exam at *www.stc.org/certification*.

IDL SIG

Preeti Mathur

In recognition of your exemplary patience, dedication, and diplomacy in co-managing the SIG, while simultaneously overseeing the training evaluation program, and porting the website to a new hosting service.

Distinguished Chapter Service Awards

In 1988, the Society initiated the Distinguished Chapter Service Award (DCSA) to recognize exemplary dedication to the chapter and its activities. The first awards were presented in 1989. Following is a list of DCSA winners for 2015 with their official citations.

Carolina

Robert Perry

For your dedication to the Carolina Chapter and for your outreach efforts to the student community and the next generation of technical communicators.

Chicago

John Hartigan

In appreciation and recognition of your vital contributions to the Chicago Metro Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication.

East Bay

Lori R. Meyer

For your leadership, guidance, and tireless commitment to making EBSTC a successful and award-winning STC community.

Northeast Ohio

Carrie Cianciola

For sustained contributions to the Northeast Ohio Chapter; for your ideas, enthusiasm, and commitment.

Philadelphia Metro

David Calloway

For sustained contributions to the Philadelphia Metro Chapter.

Philadelphia Metro

Jessica Rineer

For exceptional leadership of the Philadelphia Metro Chapter; for your selfless contributions, inspiration, energy, and continued dedication.

Phoenix

Jeanette Lee Randall

For sustained contributions to the STC Phoenix Chapter during your tenure as chapter Vice President and for exemplary service on the 2014 Summit Host Chapter Committee.

Rochester

Melanie R. Blank

For sustained contributions to the Rochester Chapter—for years of effort maintaining our Employment List, and for enthusiastically supporting and volunteering at chapter activities.

Rochester

Wendy Barnhart Ross

For your noteworthy leadership in the Rochester Chapter; for your tremendous work co-chairing the Spectrum Conference; for your capable leadership as President for two consecutive terms; for filling in as Competition Manager near the end of your presidency; and for your insightful counsel and support of the chapter as Immediate Past President.

Rocky Mountain

Marcia Wood

In recognition of your leadership, enthusiasm, providing service with a smile, and especially for implementing and managing our Active Member Rewards program and welcoming new members to our chapter as Membership Manager.

San Diego

DJ Towne

For sustained contributions to the San Diego Chapter—for your humor, wisdom, experience, and guidance.

Southeastern Michigan

Lisa Veasey

For your service and dedication to the STC Southeastern Michigan Chapter and future generations of technical communicators.

Washington, DC – Baltimore

Ugur Akinci

For your dedicated leadership, participation in chapter planning and activities, and rejuvenation of our mentoring program. We treasure the kindness you show your fellow Administrative Council members and new volunteers. We also acknowledge the benefits we receive from your many years as a thought leader in our shared profession through your website, *www.technicalcommunicationcenter.com*.

Distinguished Service Award for Students

The Distinguished Service Award for Students (DSAS) recognizes student members who provide exemplary service to the Society through their dedication to their chapter and its activities.

Following is the winner of the 2015 Distinguished SIG Service Award and their citation.

Orlando Central Florida

Lisa Bottomley

For your skill, enthusiasm, commitment, and persistence in developing and implementing an innovative secondary-level educational outreach initiative; for your service as co-manager of the Orlando Central Florida STC Chapter Education Committee; and for the value you have added as a contributor to our newsletter, a presenter at a chapter meeting, and as a member of our core leadership team.

It Is What It Is: Deadlines, Groupwork, and Cherry-Picked Data

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BY JULIE GRISHAM | *Guest Columnist*

JAKE DAVIDSON IS a project manager, assigned to the proposals group of a major international education publisher. In this position, Jake is responsible for writing and researching specific portions of proposals that his company creates as part of contract bid efforts. One day, a request for proposals (RFP) for the development of a major assessment is released and Jake is assigned as lead for this proposal initiative, tasked with overseeing the development of a proposal to provide assessment test development and scoring services for an international customer. The proposal has the potential to generate millions of dollars for the company and Jake is excited about this chance to prove himself a leader. The biggest challenge is the proposal deadline at the end of the month, just 3½ weeks away.

The deadline made it impossible to do research to be incorporated into the proposal, so Jake needed to make efficient use of the team's time. He knew he had to delegate various portions of the proposal to key personnel with strict deadlines. For most proposals written for the company's contract bids, there would be portions that contained standard text that writers replicated across proposals. When presented with time constraints such as what Jake was facing with this proposal, it was common practice to take existing text from various portions of past proposals, such as introductory text, information related to services, and research related to testing results. When research information is replicated, the text might either remain the same or change to be proposal-specific. Several groups within the company were assigned different portions of the proposal for which they needed to provide information for Jake's team. These groups included the program team, procurement, packaging/distribution, accommodated testing, publishing, and psychometrics. Jake had no problem getting information from most of the groups.

Putting It Together

After a week of working on the proposal draft, Jake and his team are having difficulty getting information from the psychometrics group in a timely manner. This group's responsibility is to analyze the design of assessment tests, to provide interpretation of results that represent student performance on various types of test questions, and to provide forecasts for future test design and administration. Doka, the psychometric lead, and his team had been tasked with providing statistics behind each type of test question, and providing statistics from other testing programs. He met with Jake to provide the information he needed for the proposal. Jake skimmed through the statistics and text. As he began to incorporate pieces

This column features ethics scenarios and issues that may affect technical communicators in the many aspects of their jobs. If you have a possible solution to a scenario, your own case, or feedback in general, please contact column editor Derek G. Ross at *dgr0003@auburn.edu*.

Editorial Note

Deadlines. We've all worked with them, and we know the particular kind of stresses that working under a time-crunch can bring. Add multiple groups, each with its own particular project component, to the mix and you've got a stress-inducing recipe for disaster, especially if one of your groups has its own agenda. In this month's Ethics case, Julie Grisham takes us through the problems a project manager faces when groups don't want to cooperate in expected ways, asking us what it means to make decisions when we're faced with someone else's cherry-picked data.

In January's column, Jessie Lambert took us through a technical communicator's dilemma when asked to make technical and scientific information more entertaining. In it, a scientific illustrator, Keanu, was asked to alter his drawings. Tammy P., from Central Wisconsin, had this to say about the case: "My recommendation to Keanu would be to attempt a compromise, incorporating the comic strip idea and even the cell dialog while retaining at least some of the detailed information that he hoped to include in his diagrams. In the technical writing role, we're often asked to consider changes to what we've written (or illustrated). This, in fact, is true in most roles in business. It's part of our jobs to create what is best for the end user while also considering the concerns and wishes of those we work with. Doing that will demonstrate his creativity and flexibility while also showing that he can create an end product that satisfies as many needs as possible."

As always, we welcome your responses. Let us know your answers to the questions we've posed, your thoughts on our roles as technical communicators in general, or send us your own Ethics cases or column ideas. Please send your responses to derek.ross@auburn.edu. *Responses will be printed in an upcoming issue of* Intercom *as space permits.*

—Derek G. Ross

into the proposal, modifying text where necessary to make sure it was understood by the public members of the proposal team, he became puzzled. While the information looked familiar, the trend it presented was not the usual. Jake went to the proposal archives. As he skimmed through previous proposals, he discovered that, while much of the information in the new proposal was replicated word-for-word, the trend did not support the research. Jake then looked in the source file for the original research stats. He found the numbers used in the proposals did not correlate with the source research. The numbers were greatly inflated, making certain "money-making" products look better than other products. This painted a picture that the stats were manipulated to lead a customer to choose one product over another—clearly benefitting the company, not the customer and not aligning with the company's goals of meeting the needs of the customer.

Seeking Support

Sharing his findings and concerns with Doka, Jake requests changes to the research section to ensure that the proposal is accurate. Doka said that the presentation of the research was always done that way and, in the end, it didn't hurt anyone. He said no changes would be made. Jake went to Doug, his manager, expressing concern because the information for this proposal showed an unusual trend that would be suspicious if left as is. Jake shared that he felt it compromised the integrity of the company to show abnormalities like these, especially if unsupported by source research. Doug responded with a simple shrug and said, "It is what it is, and if Doka says it's how we've done it, then so be it."

His manager's response was both surprising and disappointing. Jake felt he was torn between his personal ethics and doing his job. He knew that there were times when people working on other proposals requested to be removed or replaced for various reasons. It was assumed by many that there were no ramifications for doing this. Jake's "gut feeling" was that it was not an option for him because he was the lead, and if he were to ask to be removed or replaced on this proposal writing team, it would have an effect on his future advancement. His manager's words, "It is what it is," just echoed in his head.

What should Jake do?

"Cherry Picking" Information

Reproducing information across proposals is not anything new with many companies. The reasons for this practice vary from unchanging research statistics that may still apply to no time to gather new research, which was the situation in the case of Jake and his proposal. This case underscores an ethical issue of providing accurate information that best represents a company's ability to deliver the work and a personal ethic of accepting the work of others as is or pursuing the issue further.

The act of "cherry picking," or even manipulating data, may seem harmless, but in some fields, it can be harmful. For example, several cases were brought forth in the courts against Merck & Co. for misleading information that related to the efficacy of the MMR vaccine. One in particular, United States v. Merck & Co., resulted from claims of former scientists that stated Merck falsified test data to meet FDA standards (Chatom v. Merck, 2012). In this case, there is a possible result of physical harm to someone. In another case, Takata, the manufacturer of vehicle airbags, was investigated for airbag issues and forced to conduct a recall. It was found that the Takata workers were pressured to manipulate test data; however, the company, while acknowledging this occurred, stated that these practices did not affect the current recall issues. The Senate investigators in the Takata case found information that suggested otherwise. In this case, it was likely harmful (Kieler, 2016).

With both Merck and Takata, the falsification/fabrication of data was

a result of the companies' desire to achieve a positive, and most likely profitable, outcome. On the other end of the spectrum, in the fields of publishing and education, many schools and publishing companies have attempted to avoid research situations like those with Merck and Takata, and established research policies to stem rampant plagiarism or data manipulation in research. In spite of such policies, many researchers give in to pressure and take short cuts by fabricating research.

Back to Jake

In the scenario of Jake and the dilemma of falsification of research data, the psychometric team "cherry picked" the data to direct the customer's favor to a specific product that will benefit the company financially. While the outcome might not dramatically change the way the company does business, or the way products are viewed by clients, presenting only a partial view of information has ethical implications.

Questions to Consider

- Should Jake have brought his concerns about the inaccurate research to his manager?
- Should Jake escalate this issue to his manager's boss?
- Should Jake incorporate the research he's been asked to include and not question the results since he is not the "subject matter expert"?
- If Jake incorporates the information into the proposal, is it ethical for him to assume that it's not going to have an effect on the overall services the company can provide to the customer?

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MY NAME IS LIZ HERMAN AND
I'M AN STC MEMBER
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Writing for a North American Audience

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BY AMRUTA RANADE | *Guest Columnist*

A SIGNIFICANT CHUNK of the technical documentation produced for a North American audience is created outside the United States. I know this from personal experience—I am an Indian technical writer who worked for American companies throughout my career. Overexposure to American sitcoms, movies, and other media has lead us—non-American technical writers—into believing that we "know" American culture. Thus the documents that we create are based on the stereotypes and faulty assumptions about American culture. As a result, our technical documents are plagued with issues caused by a lack of cultural awareness.

Personal Realizations

I first realized this interesting situation when I came to the United States to pursue my Masters of Science degree in technical communication at Missouri University of Science and Technology. Prior to coming to the United States, I had worked as a technical writer for five years in India. I was fairly confident in my skills and believed I had a good understanding of my audience's culture. This was the case until one of my American professors made the following comment on an assignment: "This does not sound right to my American ears."

I was taken aback. I had written for an American audience for my entire career! Had I taken my audience for granted and written based on faulty cultural assumptions?

The question begged me to find out what I didn't know about writing for a North American audience, and it was the perfect opportunity to delve into how to write more effectively for an American audience. I was surrounded by American classmates and professors who could serve as my target audience and help me remedy the situation.

Another fortunate happenstance was that a course titled International Technical Communication was one of the mandatory courses in the first semester of my degree. This course provided me with the lens (Geert Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory) to look at American and Indian cultures and understand the intercultural dynamics.

Intercultural Analysis

I used the online tool on Hofstede's website to compare Indian and American cultures on the basis of Hofstede's cultural dimensions (*www.geert-hofstede.com*). The result of the comparison is shown in Table 1.

Dimension	United States	India
Power Distance	40	77
Individualism vs. Collectivism	91	48
Masculinity vs. Femininity	62	56
Uncertainty Avoidance	46	40
Long-term vs. Short-term orientation	26	51
Indulgence vs. Restraint	68	26

Table 1. Comparison of Indian and American cultures based on Hofstede's cultural dimensions

Upon completing this exercise, I realized that, to write for a North American audience, I needed to treat American culture as I would treat any other foreign culture. To develop content for a foreign culture, we need to focus on the cultural values that received opposite scores in the analysis and then try to address them in the content. From the comparison, it is evident that to develop content for an American audience, we need to focus on the cultural dimensions of power distance, individualism vs. collectivism, long-term vs. short-term orientation, and indulgence vs. restraint.

Understanding the cultural differences helped me make sense of the "rules" that are omnipresent in the Indian technical writing industry. Technical writing teams publish rules and guidelines for Indian technical writers to follow while writing for

This column features the work of individuals currently enrolled in or recently graduated from educational programs in the field. Contributors examine how theories and concepts encountered in their classes can be applied to technical communication practices. To submit a column, email the editor at *STAMANTK@ecu.edu.*

an American audience. But skimming through huge lists of rules does not help the writers because they do not understand the logic and rationale for the rules.

One of the popular rules is: avoid vague language. This rule seems straightforward and easy to implement. But in practice, what Indians consider unambiguous, clear language is what Americans may consider vague. Analyzing the rule based on the cultural dimensions, I realized that it stems from the fact that American society has a low uncertainty avoidance index as compared to Indian society.

Americans prefer factual, reality-based content. They do not prefer imaginary scenarios but prefer real-life case studies. Indians are more willing to put their creative skills to use even while reading a technical document. As an Indian writer, my default way of starting a technical article is: "Imagine a scenario where…." I can include imaginary scenarios while writing for an Indian audience, but I need to include real, factual case studies while writing for an American audience.

Another popular rule is: address the user. India is a high-context society, whereas American society is low-context. Addressing the user directly in India could be considered rude, whereas if you address the user in third person in the United States, they might find it awkward. Thus even straightforward rules need deeper interpretation from the cultural lens to understand them well.

Language

English is one of India's official languages. Most Indian working professionals are well versed with English. This is definitely true for Indian technical writers. We pride ourselves on being grammatically correct and fluent in English. That's the reason I was taken aback when I got the negative comment on my assignment. I realized that my flavor of English is International English, or British English influenced by Indianisms. Americans obviously prefer American English. The industry practice to remedy this problem is to publish an exhaustive list of words that are different in British English and American English. But I never found the lists helpful—they are way too long to be of any use in everyday writing lives, and it is a mammoth task to memorize all of them. Also, the words are not the real problem anyway—the main concern is the differences in grammar.

To overcome the issue, I started studying American grammar textbooks. I figured if I were to learn a different language, I would learn its grammar from scratch. Why would learning American English be any different? I am still learning American grammar, but it has already started paying dividends. The comments from the professor have started changing from, "This does not sound right to my American ears" to "This reads well."

Visual Communication

Another course that helped me understand the cultural difference between India and the United States was Advanced Theories of Visual Communication. The course made me aware that not only the written word but even images and visual elements of documents need to be analyzed from the cultural perspective.

For example, while choosing a typeface for a document, we would probably choose Times New Roman for an Indian audience, and Calibri or Helvetica for an American audience. This is again related to the high- and low-context indexes of the two cultures. As a high-context culture, Indian audiences prefer a traditional and formal typeface such as Times New Roman. Americans live in a low context culture, so an informal yet professional typeface, such as Calibri or Helvetica, will work well.

Technical Editing

During the peer-review sessions for each assignment, I was able to get my work reviewed by my American classmates, which helped me avoid Indianisms and British English influences in my writing. I believe that if we have an American technical editor for each Indian technical writing team, it can prove very useful.

Strategies to Consider

From these experiences, I learned the following strategies that American technical communicators can implement when working with non-American colleagues or clients:

- Make your Indian colleagues and clients aware of the cultural differences between Indian technical writers and an American audience.
- When compiling the writing rulebook of "do's" and "don'ts" for an American audience, educate the technical writers not only on the rules, but the logic and rationale for the rules. You can base the logic on Hofstede's cultural dimensions.
- Develop training programs for teaching American English to non-American technical writers.
- Educate technical writers about how visual design choices are influenced by cultural differences.
- Assign an American technical editor for every technical writing team.

Developing and implementing these strategies will help non-American technical writers create effective technical documents for an American audience.

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Mark Your Calendar

Organization Events Across the Globe

F.Y.I. lists information about nonprofit ventures only. Please send information to *intercom@stc.org.*

1 4–8 May
The **American Society for Information Science and Technology** (ASIS&T) will hold the IA Summit in Atlanta, GA. For more information, contact:
ASIS&T
asis@asis.org
http://www.iasummit.org/events/ias2016

2 15–18 May
The **Society for Technical Communication** will host its 63rd Annual Summit at the Anaheim Marriott in Anaheim, CA. For more information, please contact:
STC
+1 (703) 522-4114
http://summit.stc.org/conference/

3 25–28 May
The 2016 **Association of Record for Bid, Proposal, Business Development, Capture, and Graphics Professionals** (APMP) will hold its annual APMP Bid & Proposal Con 2016, 25–28 May at the Sheraton Boston Hotel, Boston, MA.
APMP
http://www.apmp.org/?page=2016Conference

4 15–18 June
The 2016 **American Society for Indexing** (ASI) Annual Conference will take place at the Conference Chicago University Center in Chicago, IL.
ASI
+1 (480) 245-6750
info@asindexing.org
http://www.asindexing.org/conference-2016/

5 2–5 Oct
The **IEEE Professional Communication Society** will hold its annual conference, ProComm 2016, 2–5 October at the University of Texas, Austin, TX.
IEEE Professional Communication Society
http://sites.ieee.org/pcs/future-locations/

6 5–8 Oct
The **American Medical Writers Association** (AMWA) will hold its annual Medical Writing & Communication Conference, 5–8 October at the Sheraton Denver Downtown Hotel, Denver, CO.
AMWA
http://www.amwa.org/content.asp?contentid=74
240- 238-0940

7 23–25 Oct
The **Public Relations Society of America** (PRSA) will hold its 2016 International Conference, 23–25 October at the JW Mariott in Indianapolis, IN.
PRSA
https://www.prsa.org/Conferences/International-Conference/index.html

8 2–5 Nov
The **American Translators Association** (ATA) will hold its 57th Annual Conference, 2–5 November, at the Hyatt Regency in San Francisco, CA.
ATA
http://www.atanet.org/conf/2016/
+1-703-683-6100
ata@atanet.org

* STC-related event

Running for Clarity

BY ALISA BONSIGNORE | *Senior Member*

I'M A RUNNER. It looks strange to see that written down on paper. Even though I've been running since 2006, the word "runner" to me conjures images of serious athletes with killer abs wearing nothing but sports bras and tiny micro-shorts while qualifying for the Boston Marathon. That's decidedly not me. I'm more of your lumbering-along-on-a-Saturday-morning runner, the one who is solidly 2/3 of the way toward the back of the pack in the average half marathon.

But the funny thing is that while I'm not the kind of person who gets excited about going out for a solo run, I really enjoy the camaraderie of running with others. I spent five summers running with Team in Training, the fundraising arm of the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society, for which I raised thousands of dollars for research and patient support. There I met a fantastic coach and several running buddies who keep me motivated and moving as I train for races.

What's more, I love races. No, there's no chance that I'll ever win one, but I love the energy and excitement that surrounds a race. That energy carries you, even when your legs have had enough. A good half marathon is the culmination of months of training, the celebration of the hard work you've put into preparation.

Since 2006, I've run half marathons in the Bay Area, Philadelphia and Nürnberg, Germany, and shorter races in California, Hawaii, Illinois, Texas, DC, Massachusetts and London. I try to work in a race (often just a 5k) when I'm on a business trip. I may not be inclined to run alone on an unfamiliar route in a faraway city, but I have no reservations about running alongside a thousand like-minded strangers.

Much to my surprise, I've even had the opportunity to pair writing with running as a contributor to the bestselling book, *Tales from Another Mother Runner*. In it, I talk about how expectations are everything when it comes to running. Once I let go of the "shoulds" surrounding my running, I started enjoying it more. It was a good life lesson for me.

But I realize that running isn't forever. Last year, at the request of a friend, I expanded my training repertoire and started cycling, with the goal of participating in a 55-mile ride for charity. In October, I set out on my first-ever organized ride, having raised more than $1,200 for the American Diabetes Association in honor of four friends who are Type 1 diabetics. I really enjoyed riding, and can see that being the next step for me when my knees and hips no longer handle a long run.

Whatever the activity, there's a definite connection between my body and mind. The more time I spend out there, the more time I have to work through the professional challenges of the week. The fresh air and the rhythmic breathing help me to negotiate contracts, draft emails, solve problems, rehearse talks, and look at projects in a new light. Giving my body a physical challenge gives me the mental clarity to go the distance and be a better consultant for my clients. It's also given me a good opportunity to give back to organizations that matter to me, through both fundraising and volunteering.

So look for me in the vineyards on Saturday mornings. I'll be training for one of three half marathons that are on my calendar for 2016, and solving my professional challenges as I go.

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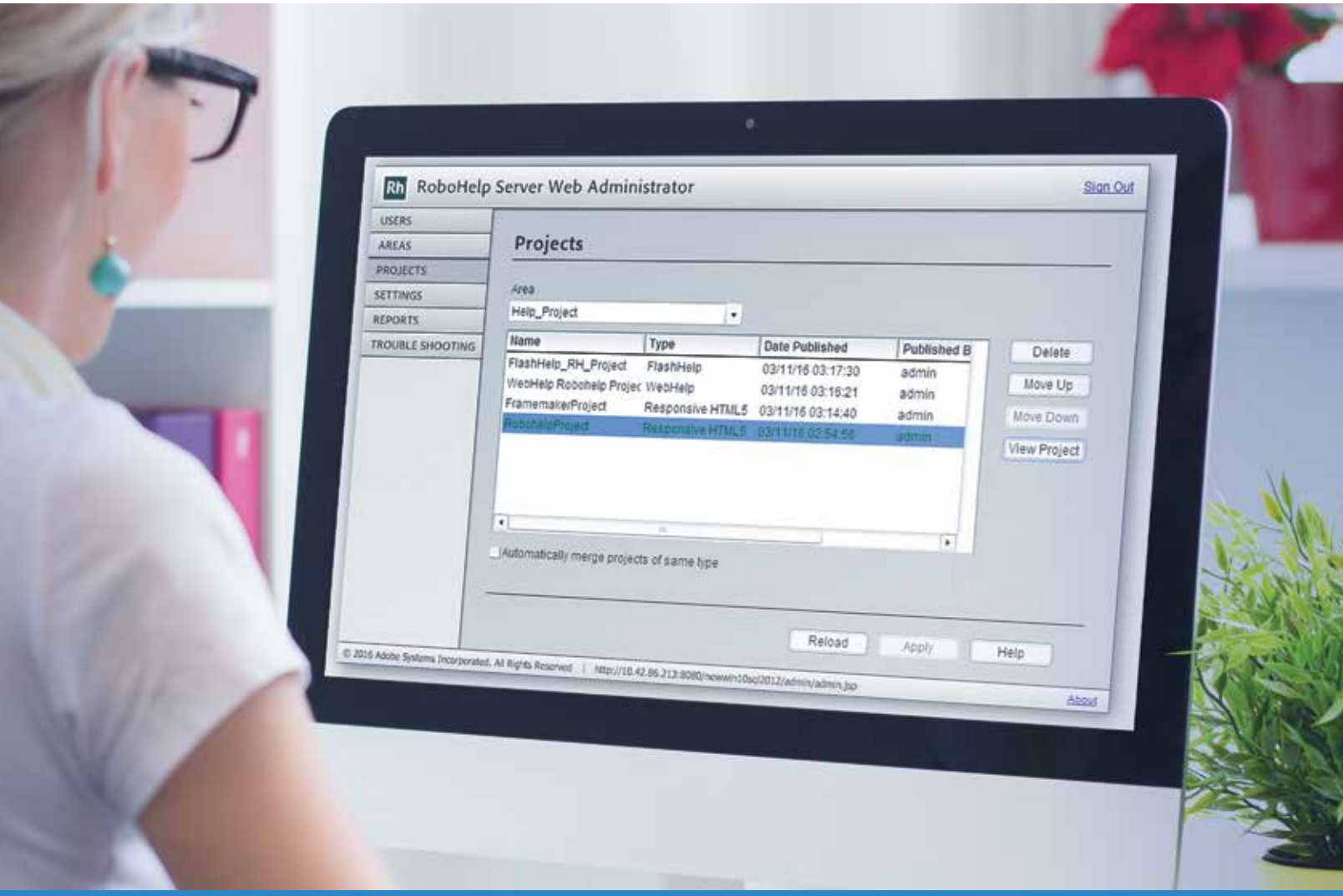

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